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*Five Years*  
*Five Countries*  
*Five Campaigns*



.... with the 141<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment









**141st Infantry Regiment  
Association**

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*Five Years – Five Countries*

*Five Campaigns*

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AN ACCOUNT OF THE  
ONE-HUNDRED-FORTY-FIRST  
INFANTRY  
IN  
WORLD WAR II

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**GIFT**



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TO THE  
FIGHTING INFANTRYMAN



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*"Lay down the axe; fling by the spade;  
Leave in its track the toiling plough;  
The rifle and the bayonet-blade  
For arms like yours were fitter now;*

*And let the hands that ply the pen  
Quit the light task, and learn to wield  
The horseman's crooked brand, and rein  
The charger on the battle-field."*

*William Cullen Bryant*

I

## *Ploughshares to Swords*

REVEILLE ON THE MORNING of November 25, 1940, was a special occasion in the 141st Infantry Regiment, Texas National Guard. At San Antonio, Texas, location of the Headquarters, long lines of intent men, outfitted in O. D. shirts, battered campaign hats and khaki breeches, listened to the reading of the President's Executive Order No. 8594, which changed them from civilians to citizen soldiers in the Army of the United States. This ceremony was repeated in various forms in other Texas towns where units of the regiment were located: El Paso, San Benito, Robstown, Waelder, Gonzales, Lockhart and Luling. The regiment was ordered into Federal Service for one year as part of the 36th (Texas) Division. The legal transition that morning was simple and short. The practical transition demanded more time.

Some 40 days after the Executive Order was read, all units of the regiment had completed the move from the various rendezvous points to their first permanent station, Camp Bowie, named after one of the great heroes of the Alamo and located approximately three miles south of Brownwood, Texas. In January, 1941, we received our share of 6,000 Selective Service men, all from Texas, which brought the 36th Division up to strength. At this time our Mobilization Training Program began, proceeding along with the building of the Camp. Here commenced the long and never ending training that found us five years, five countries and five victorious campaigns later making a lethal thrust into the heart of a crumbling German army in the Austrian Tyrol.

The training developed into a familiar routine: basic training, squad training, platoon exercises, company, battalion, regimental and division exercises culminating in field maneuvers of Corps and higher echelons of command. Then our trained men were selected for replacements to train more recently activated units. Many others left for Officer Candidate Schools, filling the constantly growing need for more and more officers in other units. New replacements came in to fill the gaps

and the training began all over again. We were performing essential duties in the great expansion of our Armed Forces.

The efforts we made had the same familiar surroundings—the plains and woods of the Texas maneuver areas, the wind and the rain, the mud and the cold, the dust and the heat; it was here that we bent ourselves to the task of acquiring skill in the art of warfare. The year, 1941, was known as “The Parade of the Wooden Soldiers”. The Nation, on the very edge of the greatest war known to history, was unprepared for war. Everything was simulated. The “enemy” was “supposed”. The guns were wooden. Only the spirit and enthusiasm of the officers and men was genuine. After the capitulation of France, a poll of national opinion found that a majority of the nation favored more aid to Britain; in the homeland of the Alamo Regiment the people were ready to fight, and we were saying, “To Hell with Hitler.”

In July, 1941, came the Louisiana Maneuvers, with the greatest concentration of troops since World War I. Here the Third Army matched recently acquired skills with the First Army. Here was Shreveport, “The Battle of the Hotel”; Leesville, “The skirmish at the Longhorn Bar”; and Lake Charles, a real Gulf hurricane. All of these were mixed in memory with forced marches, dust and heat, mosquitoes and chigger bites, long dusty columns of trucks as far as the eye could see, shirts wet and caked with dust, and tired feet. Always the tired feet, and always the rousing commands of Sergeants.

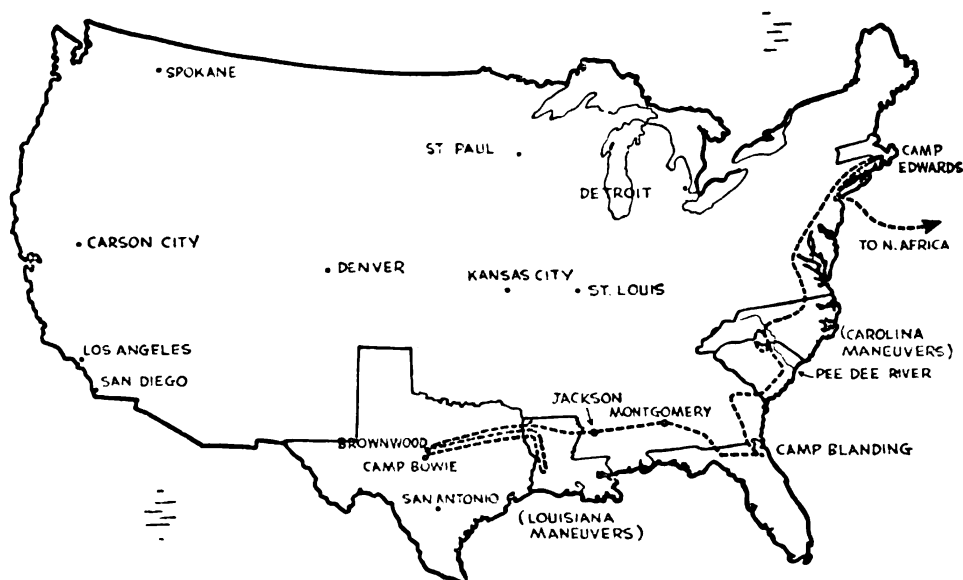


We came out of it with the strength of a newly coiled spring. In fact, some of the spring uncoiled at a bivouac site on the way back to Camp Bowie and we had to pay for damages done to private property while celebrating our maneuver victories.

The threat of open hostilities became increasingly apparent. Our original year of active service was extended.

Pearl Harbor... December 7, 1941. The sobering news added a new intentness to all training. We abandoned the schedule which included latrine screen pitching and went to the battle itself for lessons. This was war. All training was to have the realism of war.

On the morning of February 14, 1942, St. Valentine's Day, a slow, cool rain was falling. In the half-darkness of daybreak truck after truck began passing through the main gate of Camp Bowie and onto the highway to the east. They moved with convoy regularity through Brownwood, Texas. The rain stopped and



the hundreds of tires soon beat the gravel to a powdery dryness. We were on the move. Our column, over 60 miles long, stopped that night in the fields near Terrell, Texas. Then the rains came again. The next morning over 400 vehicles were stuck in the mud. Winches wouldn't do the job. The Colonel said, "If machines fail, the men won't." The tug of mud began. Ropes were attached to vehicles and one by one they were pulled to the road by heaving rows of men. We made it—we always had. That night, five hours late, we arrived at the scheduled bivouac area in Louisiana. The following morning, back on schedule, we rolled to a bivouac site past Jackson, Mississippi. "Convoy wise", after camping down at Montgomery, Alabama and Ponticello, Florida, we rolled into our new permanent station, Camp Blanding, Florida.

Our ranks, depleted by cadres and transfers, were refilled at our new station with men from Ohio, Kentucky, Tennessee and West Virginia. Here began the long trail of replacements that grew constantly in volume and brought men into the Alamo Regiment from every State in the Union, men proud of their American backgrounds, their homes and their people, men from Brooklyn, Detroit, Kansas City and Los Angeles. In increasing numbers they took their appointed places in the thinning ranks of Texans as time went on, and later they fought together, side by side, securing for themselves new battle honors for the regiment to place with its older ones, attaining new heights of personal sacrifice, new records of endurance, suffering and courage—adding new luster to the common heritage of heroism of the colors of Texas and of the people of all the United States.

We had our first amphibious training at Camp Blanding, learned new expedients for crossing streams, learned to swim with and without equipment, and par-

ticipated in exercises with live ammunition. On weekends we visited Jacksonville, St. Augustine, Daytona Beach, Jacksonville Beach and Silver Springs. We trained always; more marches ... more heat ... more sweat ... twenty-five miles per day with equipment ... rain ... mud ... wind ... sun. We were ready to take to the field again.

July 6, 1942. Our columns were on the roads once more. We arrived in the Carolina maneuver area and began the series of great field exercises that reached their climax on the great Pee Dee river. "This is your last dry run," the Corps Commander told us. "The next time you will face a real enemy." It wasn't our last run, but it was *dry*—the marches all over again, the dusty columns, the tired feet, the heat, the sweat and the lessons of war. On the more enjoyable side were the watermelons that tasted cool when taken from the fields in the early morning and kept in the shade until noon. Then there were the peaches, delicious and ripe; the "maneuver crop" was good around Wadesboro, North Carolina, in '42.

Then flash! News travels in the Army ranks with a speed otherwise unknown to man. The 36th (Texas) Division will not return to Camp Blanding. We will entrain for Camp Edwards, Massachusetts. The word came straight from the mail orderly who had talked to a truck driver, who had a cousin who worked at Division Headquarters. It was confirmed by a latrine orderly—it was *true*.

August, 1942 ... Camp Edwards, Massachusetts. Vast fields of cranberry bogs unfolded before us. Occasional weekends were enjoyed in New York, Providence, Buzzards Bay, Falmouth and Boston. We took Martha's Vineyard in an amphibious operation and made it again secure for the United States. Night marches became more numerous and as a result we were continually falling in and crawling out of the cranberry bogs. We endured the snow and the cold of New England. When it dropped to eight degrees above zero the rumor came out that we were headed for the tropical Pacific. The arctic training was only counter intelligence work.

But before the snow melted on Cape Cod, the gang plank started rattling most



realistically. Officers and men had been sent to North Africa as observers of the operations in Tunisia and were beginning to return with the "hot poop".

April 2, 1943. We sailed out of New York Harbor aboard the troop transport U.S.S. Brazil. Here began an entirely new type of existence—a life of cramped compartments and



seasickness, a life void of radios and electric razors and limited to two meals a day. Entertainment consisted of playing poker on the open deck, chess and dice in the wardroom, reading in whatever spot we could find to sit down, and continually looking at the other ship in the convoy which was supposed to be loaded with WAC's—but wasn't. Then there was the screech of the public address system and the coarse, nasal tones of the speaker: "The smoking lamp is out; all port holes will be secured; these rules are for your own safety." Submarine contacts kept life from becoming dull. There were 26 contacts to be exact, but some GI said that most of them were probably fish instead of submarines. Yet the threat must have been there—one man was fined \$15.00 for throwing an apple core over the side.



April 13, 1943 ... Oran, Algeria. Standing with our barracks bags crammed full with impregnated clothing and full-field equipment—standing looking out of the portholes and throwing cigarettes to the dockworkers—standing in the dark under the loading sheds at the port waiting for trucks—standing in lines—three years in the Army and two years standing in lines.

We struggled to get the heavily loaded bags on the trucks. Full as the bags were, much personal equipment had to be left behind. Once on the trucks, we moved out to the staging area at Assi-ben-Okba. The next morning we tried out our French Lesson Booklet. "Bum jeer, Mon-sewer," we addressed the first civilian we met while walking down the road. "They speak French with a Texas accent," the Frenchman answered in English, indicating us to a group of GI's standing near by.

We encountered our first 40-and-8 as we rode on the colonial railway from Oran to Magenta, an old French Foreign Legion outpost. Later came visits to the Headquarters of the French Foreign Legion at Sidde-bel-Abbess.

"Are those stories by P. C. Wren about Beau Geste true?" we asked the guide at their magnificent museum.

"Vee hav allways thot it a goot zing perhaps to be a Hollywood Legionnaire," he answered, arching his eyebrows.

Africa meant more training. All Army posts, camps and stations are alike, only some are worse than others. To most of us, Magenta belonged to the others. Here we swallowed our first atebine and participated in the Battle of Atebrine Mountain, drank red wine and encountered the heat again as we marched down dusty roads, some of us with red poppies stuck in the muzzles of our M-I's.

May, 1943. Some of our men and officers went over on temporary duty and fought with another division in Tunisia, where the battle against Rommel's famed Afrika Korps was coming to a close. The regiment moved to Arzew, Algeria for amphibious training. Arzew was known as "The home of the dancing girls", only they didn't live there anymore, and it wasn't exactly like any home we had ever known. It was, however, unmistakably an Invasion Training Center designed to prepare men for the coming assaults upon the mainland of Europe. When we had completed our lessons here, we moved all the way across North Africa to the Casablanca area. Some travelled by 40-and-8's and some moved by motor. A great scenic road through the Atlas Mountains unfolded before us as we passed through the many colonial towns of North Africa—St. Barbe-du-Tclat, Tlemcen, Meknes, Oujda, Fez, Sale, Port Lyauty, Rabat and Fedalia. Our bivouac area was in the Cork Forest.

"North Africa is almost as big as Texas," one Texan remarked.

"And almost as barren," a buddy from Boston replied.

July, 1943. We retraced our route across North Africa and returned for more amphibious training at Mostaganem, Algeria, after completing our mission of training, guarding PW's and maintaining security outposts on the beaches near Casablanca. In August, 1943, we ran the "Cowpuncher" operation—the final dry run for the then secretly proposed landings at Salerno, Italy. Then we moved into a staging area near St. Cloud and Arzew, about 15 miles from the Port of Oran. General Eisenhower came down to see us. We stood in massed formation for about three hours under the broiling hot sun. Powdery dust blew and settled on our shirts. The General drove by and smiled and waved at us. We were standing rigidly at attention, and since we didn't do "Eyes Right" or "Left", saw little of him. Then we turned onto the road after slinging arms, and marched back towards the bivouac area.

"Rout Step!" bellowed the CO—just like CO's always bellow commands. Down the line one soldier turned to his dusty comrade and gave his impression of the visit of the Supreme Allied Commander. "Sure looked clean, didn't he?"

Our vehicles had been waterproofed. It was September, 1943. We were combat loaded for an amphibious assault on a hostile shore. We were ready.

The next day we completed loading on transports in Oran harbor. Along with attached units, we loaded on the U.S.S. Carroll, U.S.S. Jefferson, U.S.S.



O'Hara, U.S.S. Arturus, H.M.S. Thruster and H.M.S Orontes. This was the real thing.

After the transports were safely away from shore, orders and maps were brought out and each man was assigned his mission. Our regiment, plus attachments, was to land in the early hours of September 9, 1943, on the shores adjacent to the Gulf of Salerno. Our 1st Battalion and 3rd Battalion were in the assault, the 1st on the right, the 3rd on the left. The 2nd Battalion was to follow closely behind the 3rd. Our left beach was designated as "Yellow" Beach and our right beach as "Blue", placing our right elements about two and one-half miles north of Agropoli, Italy. Our mission was to clear the enemy beaches of all resistance to a depth of about two miles and to protect the right flank of the beachhead. The maps were complete and detailed. Photographs and sketches were studied until every foot of the enemy shore and its defenses was imprinted in the minds of all men and officers.

Final briefing came on the morning of September 8, 1943. Most of us attended final religious services. Then we smoked and waited, or played cards, or cleaned our weapons and went over our orders again. That afternoon we heard about the unconditional surrender of Italy. The British troops were advancing up the toe of Italy at an unchecked pace. We really felt good and went around smiling and joking. Maybe we wouldn't have to fight for that beach after all. Then the loud speakers announced: "Attention! All troops. Attention! Although the Italians have surrendered, the Germans are known to have large forces available in Italy. We may expect to find them tomorrow when we land on the beaches of Paestum. We are ready. We have planned for a victorious establishment of a beachhead on a hostile shore. It will be victorious. There will be no change in orders. Go in shooting."

The convoy was attacked by enemy aircraft on the far left flank after dark. The Navy sprang to its battle stations as the troops filed below decks to clear the weather decks for action. The ships threw heavy concentrations of flak into the

sky, cutting the night with walls of streaking tracers. The location of our ships by enemy planes had eliminated some of the element of surprise upon which we had greatly depended.

At 2300 hours on September 8th, the call to General Quarters was sounded. Immediately the ship was filled with the groaning and creaking of cables and winches as landing craft was placed in position for lowering into the water. Ammunition, weapons, radios and the hundreds of items of military equipment were being checked again and placed in designated positions for loading into landing craft. Troops began collecting their packs and weapons.

This was it.



*"Art, thou hast many infamies,  
But not an infamy like this.  
O snap the fife and still the drum  
And show the monster as she is."*

*Richard Le Gallienne*

## II

# *Bloody Salerno*

At 0001 hours, September 9, 1943, the first of our boat teams was called to station. Due to the presence of coastal guns, railway artillery and mines, which blocked a close approach to the shores adjacent to the Gulf of Salerno, it was necessary for the larger transports to anchor some twelve miles from the beaches. The great historic significance of our efforts in being the first American troops to invade the mainland of Europe was lost in the intensity of each living moment—the blindness of coming into the darkness of the open decks from the lighted compartments below; the bottomless insecurity of the landing craft suspended in mid-air from the davits; the dryness in the throat that water would not take away; the incredible noise of a transport shifting smaller craft and personnel into the air where they disappeared into a darkness without walls or foundation; the lurching uneasiness of the boats idling in column and then coughing and circling endlessly in the rendezvous area.

As the craft formed into successive waves and started the pitching, endlessly rolling ride to the invisible shore, the backdrop of the entire sky to our left was illuminated by restless reflections of heavy gunfire where the British were laying down a preparation before landing. As we drew closer to the shore, we could see great fires burning in the Salerno area to the north. Since no preparation was to precede our landing, all was silent to our front. "There is nothing as quiet as a battlefield before the battle."

At 0330 hours, assault waves of our 1st and 3rd Battalions touched the beaches—beaches dominated in front and on the right by high hills from two to four miles inland. Our 1st Battalion was landed approximately 500 yards south of their designated Blue Beach. The first two waves of men proceeded inland, but as the third wave landed hostile guns engaged us from well prepared and strongly manned positions. Elements worked their way to the vicinity of a railroad bridge. The bulk of our men, however, was spread between the railroad bridge and the

landing area when the enemy launched a vicious attack, supported by tanks, against the open left flank of our 1st Battalion and the exposed right flank of our 3rd Battalion, driving a wedge between the two units and effectively preventing consolidation of the ground where our 1st Battalion had landed. The enemy turned his attack full to the south and cut deeply into our troops, engaged them with cross fire from guns in depth to our left, our front and to our right, rendering, for the time, any position on the edge of Blue Beach untenable.

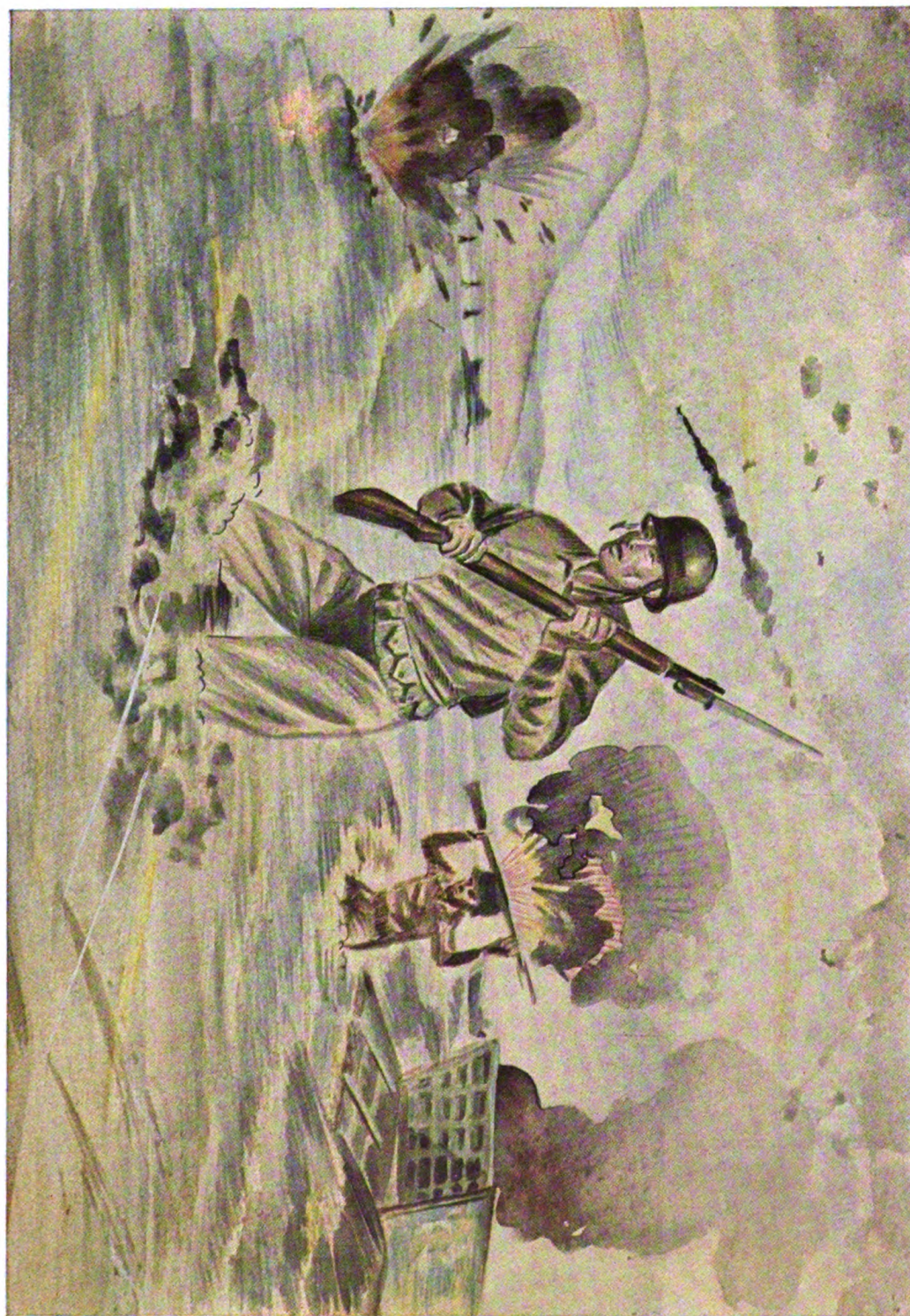
Enemy fire attained such an intensity that it was necessary to abandon further landing efforts on Blue Beach. Only three out of seven scheduled waves were able to land in this area. Subsequent waves, thoroughly disorganized, could not be controlled effectively in the water. Some coxswains moved to Yellow Beach to discharge their personnel; others simply milled about; some started to return to their ships.

Fifth and subsequent waves met tank fire from the plain and from a battery of 88 mm. guns on Hill 78. Several boats were hit some distance from the shore, and our surviving personnel abandoned their equipment and attempted to swim to shore past others who floated in the water, dead or wounded. One craft, carrying elements of Company D, was sunk offshore and the men were picked up by an empty boat on its return trip. These men were re-equipped with submachine guns and landed later on Yellow Beach. Several craft, hit on the beach or near the shore, burned or drifted pilotlessly with their helpless cargo of dead and wounded.

The terrain in our 1st Battalion's area was flat and cut by irrigation ditches bordered by bushes and a few small trees. Isolated patches of scrub growth were scattered throughout the area. Our men sought cover from the tank fire in the shallow ditches and concealment in the scrub growth. Attacking Germans fired down the ditches and swept the brush with fire from small arms and tanks.

Three 75 mm. pack-howitzers, self-propelled, of our Cannon Company were slated to arrive in the third wave to support our 1st Battalion on Blue Beach. One craft, containing one of the guns, was turned back by the Navy, while another gun was disabled by a mine before clearing the beach, leaving only one gun to support our hard pressed troops. While the crew was directing this gun into a defile from which it could fire, they were engaged by enemy fire and the sight was destroyed. The platoon leader returned to the disabled gun on the beach, retrieved its sight and returned to his firing position. The gunner endeavored to place the sight in position, but was hit by machine gun fire and instantly killed. The platoon leader, taking the gunner's position to adjust the sight, was seriously wounded before he could put the gun in operation.

As morning brought light, the Germans launched another attack, attempting complete destruction of our troops on Blue Beach. This attack was supported by







five Mark IV tanks which overran the area several times and withdrew inland only after our men, sparked by the fury of desperation, counterattacked the armor individually and without organization, employing hand grenades and rifles. The retreating tanks left behind them a carnage of dead and wounded. The battalion had been completely neutralized as an offensive force, although it still held tenaciously to its landing area. Overwhelmed by superior fire, the men were prevented from reorganizing during the daylight hours of our initial day.



Our 3rd Battalion, coming in to the left of our 1st Battalion, landed on Yellow Beach, which was about 30 yards deep. Farther inland, the landing area consisted of a dune covered with scrub growth and followed by low, swampy ground from 30 to 75 yards wide, running parallel to the shore line. Beyond this defile was a flat area, cut by a number of shallow irrigation ditches and one canal, and dotted with numerous patches of bushes and a few small trees. Many rock fences about four feet high paralleled the shore, and some formed narrow channels in the line of advance, separating small farms and homesteads.

The assault waves of our 3rd Battalion, proceeding in original boat team groups, completely overran the first defenses of Yellow Beach, despite enemy small arms, mortar, artillery and tank fire which was directed at all waves. Because of the defender's violent reaction, the companies were unable to complete reorganization. Nevertheless, the battalions, advancing by infiltration, cleared the enemy fence by fence and house by house for a distance of about 400 yards before the Germans counterattacked our right flank. This enemy thrust, supported by tanks, was successfully broken up by elements of Company K, under the leadership of the operations officer, who was wounded in the leg and placed on the side of the canal after receiving medical attention. The tanks reformed and again pressed

forward. The wounded officer, exposed to fire at the position where he lay helpless on the ground, continued to direct the defense of the flank until killed by the assaulting enemy.

The Germans, unable to penetrate the area of the rock fences, reformed time and time again and attacked in groups of two, four and six tanks. These assaults were repulsed each time by the use of anti-tank grenades, rocket grenades, machine guns and mortars, since no supporting weapons of the field type had yet arrived. Elements of all companies were finally able to establish a thin line along the canal. Behind this line the battalion was able to make considerable progress towards reorganization by daybreak.

A Sergeant from Company I, unconscious from the concussion of an exploding 88 mm. shell which killed two members of his squad, was evacuated to a ship for medical attention. Upon regaining consciousness, he asked for permission to return to his men. After being refused permission by a medical officer, he asked to see the ship's Captain who reconsidered his case and allowed him to go ashore on the first boat.

With our 1st Battalion on the right neutralized by overpowering tank action on the flat ground, and our 2nd delayed in landing, it was our 3rd Battalion which bore the full brunt of the initial German firepower and counterattacks, both frontal and flanking. The men, however, fought doggedly on without artillery support or assistance from adjacent units, replenishing their depleted supply of ammunition from the dead and wounded.

Our 2nd Battalion began coming in at 0530 hours on Yellow Beach and proceeded to the embattled left flank of the 3rd Battalion. Fortunately, they landed during a lull in the fighting and were able to maintain unit integrity.

One wave of the 2nd Battalion was constituted wholly of British landing craft, manned by the Royal Navy. Just as the wave nosed to the shoreline, a German gun fired tracers harmlessly over the boats from the left flank. The troops, poised with bayonets fixed, seemed to hesitate momentarily. The coxswain shouted: "Run lads, run! The Jerries are waiting!"

The regimental command group landed at 0550 hours and established a command post behind the 3rd Battalion, which was still struggling to maintain its foothold. Immediate attempts by the shore party to contact the Navy for supporting fire failed. Only two of our twelve supporting artillery guns arrived as scheduled. The others had been turned to sea by the Navy, and were to come in at Red Beach to our north later.

Between 0730 and 0830 hours, with full light of morning and observation from the commanding terrain, the enemy mounted his most determined attack. Supported by 88 mm. self-propelled fire, rifle fire, mortars and tank artillery







teams, assault groups of an elite Panzer unit, armed principally with light machine guns, began their coordinated attack. The area of Blue and Yellow Beaches seemed to break into flame as shell after shell exploded in the sand and the water, setting fire to landing craft and shore installations. Clouds of black smoke billowed above the terrifying cannonade. Wounded men, waiting near the beach for evacuation to the ships, were wounded again, and others, already wounded, were killed. The reverberation of the exploding shells and the ear-splitting crescendo of bullets drowned out the shouts of commands and the anguish of the wounded and dying. Our individual men disappeared in an inferno of violence.

The waves of arriving boats were in utter confusion. One landing craft, hit solidly in front by tank fire at point blank range, seemed to rise completely out of water. Sinking and spinning crazily, it was hit astern by a second shell and became screened in its blast of smoke and flame. Men from other disabled craft were washed ashore. Some, freshly wounded, were tossed up helplessly by the waves and died bleeding on the sand, which was cleaned again and again by the constant surf.

The battle raged on, swelling in volume and violence. The suffocating odor of explosives burned sensitive passages of the nose. Ears ached with an intensity beyond awareness of pain. Throats gasped at the air filled with smoke and dust. Eyes reddened and vision dulled in an atmosphere fouled by death and destruction.

The landing of men and supplies had to be stopped. With nothing arriving at the beaches and with no contact with the Navy by radio, we stood alone. "Yes," one veteran said later, smiling grimly as he read a newspaper report praising commanders for putting their command posts in the front lines at Salerno, "they had to be there—we didn't have anything that morning but front lines and water."

The enemy tanks were almost to the beaches between our flanks. Just as the Germans seemed to balance us on the brink of disaster and seemed poised for the fatal thrust, their attack stopped as abruptly as it had started. A backwash of silence pounded ears like a clap of thunder. Then came the reassuring, familiar crack of our weapons rising in volume, dominating the withdrawal fires of the enemy.

With the sound of our guns came new spirit.

Our 2nd Battalion, still intact, launched its thrust between the 3rd Battalion and the ruins of Paestum to the north. With two companies in the assault and one covering the extension of the right flank, and with heavy weapons neutralizing fires from the right flank, the unit moved out and met with immediate success. Although enemy machine gunners, supported by eight tanks, were operating across the area, they were dispersed by the fury of the assault.

At 0915 hours, as the German tanks were regrouping near the railroad crossing, the first naval gun support was received. The initial salvo, hitting only a few

hundred yards from our troops, landed in the center of the enemy concentrations, causing their complete dispersal. Two of eight tanks were knocked out and the remainder made a hasty retreat to the east and south. Companies E and F were across the railroad, and our 3rd Battalion consolidated its position and began to advance. A new feeling of confidence was spreading in our ranks.

"Never a shot fired in anger," repeated one of our riflemen as he calmly adjusted his sight and aimed carefully at a new target. "I'd rather been born a girl baby," said his companion, busy with a Browning Automatic, to no one in particular.

Artillery came into position and our counterbattery and Naval gunfire began to silence enemy batteries. Wire communication had been established between the command post and the 2nd and 3rd Battalions. The command post displaced inland about 500 yards by 1200 hours. Landing craft had resumed use of the beaches, and armor and supplies began to pour into every available area.

The flood-tide of battle had passed. We were there to stay.

During the afternoon of September 9, 1943, the Germans attempted to bomb our landing beaches, but were driven off by anti-aircraft fire. The planes came in at high speed and dropped their bombs haphazardly, causing little damage, then veered sharply to the east and disappeared over the mountains. Friendly fighter coverage, although operating from bases in Sicily, 185 miles away, kept the skies relatively clear of enemy planes.

At 1900 hours, an attack plan was formulated. The 2nd and 3rd Battalions were to move south, going around the 1st Battalion, clear the Germans from the line of advance down Highway 18, and secure positions in the Hill Colina San Marco and hill masses northeast of Agropoli. This movement began at 0001 hours, September 10, 1943. A small amount of small arms fire failed to slow the movement of the 3rd Battalion, and it was able to close into its sector before daylight. The 2nd Battalion observed enemy activity, but its movement into the high hills to the left of the 3rd was made without incident. Patrols preceding the units noted signs of hasty retreat—burned and wrecked vehicles, disabled tanks and quantities of supplies.

At 0750 hours, September 10th, communication was established with our 1st Battalion. About 300 men of the battalion, under the commander of Company B, proceeded to mop up enemy opposition in the area, capturing 17 prisoners. The 1st Battalion was then reorganized and moved into regimental reserve north of the 3rd Battalion.

On September 10th the regiment established the Agropoli-Ogliastro-Trentinara defense line guarding the right flank of the Army beachhead. This position was maintained without incident until the afternoon of September 13, 1943.



ITALY — SCENE ONE





At this time our 2nd Battalion, less Company F, and our 3rd Battalion, less Company K, entrucked in the Ogliastro-Agropoli area, along with the command group, and moved to a sector between Highway 18 and the shore, southwest of Battipaglia. Here the Germans had been attempting to split our invasion forces and drive us into the sea. We were attached to the 45th (Thunderbird) Division, which had begun landing on September 10th and had elements on our right flank. The 23rd Armored Regiment, British, was on our left. We began to detruck in the new area by dusk. The 3rd Battalion was to occupy the front line, supported by the 2nd Battalion in depth.

At 2200 hours, orders were received from VI Corps releasing the 2nd Battalion to the 36th Division. They were then moved by truck to an area south of the Sele River, east of Highway 18 in the Defensa hill mass, and attached to the 143rd Infantry Regiment. Company F rejoined the 2nd Battalion and took up positions to the left of Company E.

The area occupied by the 3rd Battalion southwest of Battipaglia was the narrowest sector of the entire Army beachhead, being but two miles deep, and was the critical juncture of the American VI and the British X Corps. The battalion was subjected to several minor attacks by the Germans on September 15th, all of which were broken up. One full scale attack was received on the morning of September 16th, when the enemy assaulted with tank supported infantry. This attack was repulsed. Our 3rd Battalion remained on the defensive with slight adjustments in its line until the Germans began an orderly withdrawal. After following the retreating enemy to a position between Battipaglia and Eboli, the battalion was relieved on September 19th by elements of the 45th Division.

The 1st Battalion was moved into a defensive position east of Highway 18

near the Sele River. This sector was maintained with minor improvements until September 19th.

The 2nd Battalion remained in position on the Defensa hill mass, where they had moved on the night of the 13-14th September, until September 18th. Continual harassing fire was directed into their positions from enemy guns in the vicinity of enemy held Altavilla. Company F was attacked by tanks, but was able to maintain its positions. The crew of one enemy tank was killed while abandoning the tank after it had been stopped by mechanical difficulties. The high ground occupied by our 2nd Battalion afforded a good view of the entire beachhead. They were able to watch the tank attacks on the plains below and the bombing of the Tobacco Factory by our planes. "Hitler count your children" became a familiar expression. And when the German planes came over the beach, our men crawled out of their battered fighting holes to watch.

On the night of September 18th the 2nd Battalion was moved into a sector on the hill mass just below and to the west of Altavilla. Since the Germans had withdrawn, the move was accomplished without incident. That is, without incident except for a company commander who stumbled in the darkness, fell on his musette bag and fractured a rib on a C-ration can.

The battle for the Salerno beaches was over. The defeated enemy had begun its withdrawal up the Italian peninsula. On September 21, 1943, the regiment was ordered into bivouac below Altavilla near the Sele River, along with the remainder of the 36th Division which went into Army reserve for reorganization, replacement of equipment and a much needed rest. Naples fell and a great port for entrance of supplies was secured. With the realization of the great historical significance of our achievements came a new pride, the pride of battles—we had been the first American troops to land on the continent of Europe. We had met the enemy on the beaches and had driven him back.

*"They march from safety, . . . to the land where all  
Is ruin, and nothing blossoms but the sky . . ."*

*Siegfried Sassoon*

### III

## *The Assault on San Pietro*

We left the Altavilla area on October 13, 1943, and moved by truck through Salerno, Avellino and Naples to the apple orchards three miles southwest of Guigliano. Here we continued our training. The rumble of artillery could be heard from the front lines now at the Volturno River about 20 kilometers away. The Germans made nightly bomb runs over our installations at Naples. Notwithstanding these reminders of war, October was a memorable month in Italy. We went on frequent passes into Naples, saw historic Vesuvius, visited the ruins at Pompeii, the resort at Sorrento, and occasionally caught a boat ride to the famous Isle of Capri. We spiced our rations with fresh potatoes, tomatoes, beans, sweet peppers and onions, which we bought from the Italians; a few moonlight "deals" furnished fresh meat and fresh eggs. We made our acquaintance with vino, Alberti gin,



40-octane cognac and grappa. We learned how to parlate mucho Italiano and watched the parade of signorinas "Somewhere on Via Roma". We ate spaghetti and looked on the wine when it was red. We thought Al Ricovero was a very popular fellow because he had his name on buildings all over Naples, until we found out that the words meant "bomb shelter".

October was indeed a good month.

On November 2, 1943, after amphibious training in the Bay of Naples, we entrucked and moved down to the Isle of Nisida and loaded on LCT's for the purpose of making a water envelopment of the German line near Gaeta. We loaded on the landing craft by 1430 hours and stood or waited quietly for the hour of departure which had been set for just after sundown. At 1630 hours, after being told not to engage in any demonstrations or shouting, we discovered that no actual landing would be made. None had ever been intended. Information as to the place of the landing had been allowed to leak out. Our training and loading had

been designed to draw German troops from their positions in the center of the lines to the coastal sector in order to enhance the success of an attack into the mountain positions. Reports indicated that our work was a success. Our feint continued until after dark, and then we returned to the apple orchard area. We relaxed from the pre-invasion tenseness of troops ready for action, and smiled. "You will have tomorrow off," the company commander announced. "There will be no basic battle drill."

Although the news that we were not to make a landing had been greeted with silence, release from the daily schedule of battle drill was too much for some of us. A few whooped joyfully and, carried away by the surprise of the occasion, volunteered for K. P. on the day off.

On November 6, 1943, we moved by truck to Pignataro, closing into a reserve position at Pietra Vairano the next day.

November 16th was cold and rain fell unceasingly from low, dark clouds. We took down our shelter halves and rolled our packs in the mud. We were going back into the lines. Everything became soaked with the cold water and caked with the mud. This was our first day of approaching winter amongst the mud and the mountains of Italy. This was the first of many days—endless numbers of days in weary recollection, days of wet chill which cut so deeply into the body that however much successive summers of peace may soften, they will never erase the memory.

The command post was moved into an Italian farmhouse south of Mignano on the slopes of Mignano gap a few hundred yards off of Highway 6. The battalions and separate units began arriving after dusk and detrucked about five miles from the lines. The 2nd and 3rd Battalions went into bivouac positions in the rear as regimental reserve. The 1st Battalion marched to the southeast slopes of Mount Lungo to effect relief of the 15th Infantry Regiment, which was in position about two and one-half miles northwest of the town of Mignano.

It had rained throughout the day, and the rain continued all night as our men of the 1st Battalion slogged along Highway 6 to the mountain in mud over their ankles, slipping and sliding into pools of water. Upon leaving the road they scrambled over wet and slippery rocks on the slopes of the position. Harassing artillery fire was layed down on the route of advance by the enemy. As the shells screamed in, men sought cover on the ground and became covered with mud from head to foot.

Relief of the 15th Infantry was completed by 0030 hours on November 17, 1943. Carrying parties were organized immediately from the 2nd and 3rd Battalions in order to place sufficient supply dumps well forward in the event enemy action prevented normal resupply. Enemy artillery concentrations sought these



men as they followed their slippery path through the mud and rocks with their backbreaking loads of ammunition, food and water. They stumbled and fell into the dark, cold pools of water. Several casualties resulted.

On November 18th, an enemy combat group assaulted our positions. With effective support from our Cannon Company, the attack was repulsed.

Our 2nd Battalion moved from its reserve position and effected the relief of the 2nd Battalion, 143rd Infantry Regiment on Mount Rotondo during the night of November 19-20th. The 1st and 2nd Battalions were now situated on hills across from each other, separated by Highway 6 which curved through the narrow valley between, following closely the base of Mount Lungo. The enemy occupied most of Mount Lungo, our 1st Battalion maintaining a defensive line on the open, exposed southwest tip. Since both Mount Lungo and Mount Rotondo overlooked the broad valley in which the villages of San Pietro, San Vittore and Cassino were located—all of them important links in the German winter line—our 1st and 2nd Battalions were subjected to almost constant artillery, mortar and machine gun fire. The mountains were devoid of vegetation in many places, and the troops experienced great difficulty in locating adequate cover and concealment. The Mount Camino hill mass, occupied by the enemy, afforded him excellent observation of all movement in the regimental area. Strict movement discipline was necessary. All supply activities were carried on at night from the field train located at Presenzano.

Although the Germans traded us shell for shell in the artillery duels that marked the occupation of the defensive lines, the arrival of additional artillery soon turned the balance in our favor. The entire front seemed to be alive and fitfully uneasy. Ever present was the low rumble of distant guns and the vibrations underfoot caused by the reverberations of the exploding shells. Since the rain was always with us, men in forward positions found their daylight movement restricted and spent much of the day in water waist deep. Only with the arrival of darkness were they able to bail the water and mud out with their helmets. Clothing, blankets and equipment became soggy and mud-covered almost beyond recognition.

On the night of November 20-21st, our 3rd Battalion effected the relief of the 1st Battalion, which reverted to regimental reserve. Just prior to moving up for the relief, long range artillery fell in the reserve area, wounding 13 men of Company K.

Due to exposed positions the wounded were not evacuated until night, whenever delay in treatment was possible. Litter teams would leave the aid stations at dusk and climb up to the unit positions. It was impossible to avoid slipping and falling on the wet and muddy rocks while carrying the litter cases. This evacuation

continued through hours of darkness until the aid men, unshaven and drawn with fatigue, fell into exhausted sleep in the greyness of morning, oblivious to the mud and the rain.

Early in the afternoon of November 21, 1943, a heavy enemy concentration fell directly on the command post, causing a number of casualties and disrupting communications. The regimental surgeon was killed. Shortly thereafter, a German force attempted to penetrate the left flank of our 3rd Battalion, but was thrown back.



On the night of November 26-27th, the 1st Battalion relieved the 3rd. On November 29th, Companies I and K were detailed as carrying parties to deliver supplies to units of the 142nd Infantry.

Although artillery exchanges dominated the action during November, our patrols entered German positions and constantly explored the forward areas in an effort to determine the strength and disposition of the Krauts. These actions were marked by frequent clashes with the enemy, the taking of prisoners and the loss of men.

Our 1st Battalion was attacked by about 100 enemy troops on the night of November 30th. The Germans, assaulting in the dark from three sides, were forced to withdraw after bitter exchanges of fire and minor engagements at close range.

The disagreeable weather and the roughness of the terrain proved even more formidable than the Germans. The cold, grey, dismal November days extended into December. The daily rains continued and the earth became a black gravy of mud. The rocky slopes became even more slippery and treacherous. The fighting holes remained filled with water. There were no buildings in the area and troops in reserve positions slept under conditions comparable to those of the elements maintaining the line.

On the night of December 2-3rd, the 3rd Battalion, less Companies I and K which were still attached to the 142nd Infantry, relieved elements of the 2nd Battalion less Companies F and G which remained in position.

On the morning of December 6th, the first Italian troops to enter combat with Allied forces arrived in the regimental sector to effect relief of our 1st Battal-

ion on Mount Lungo. The Italian units were the 1st Motorized Group which contained, among others, the Bersagliere Battalion. The Italian Headquarters was set up in the same building with the regimental command post.

The units of the 2nd Battalion which had been in reserve moved up on the night of December 6-7th and relieved the 3rd Battalion elements on Mount Rotondo. The 3rd Battalion, rejoining Companies I and K, continued to support the 142nd Infantry by carrying supplies for their attack into the steep, slippery slopes of the Mount Camino-Mount Maggiore hill mass.

Our 1st Battalion, relieved by the Italian units, closed into bivouac near Presenzano on December 7th. Several German planes strafed the valley and road near the regimental command post as well as our positions on Mount Rotondo.

At 0630 hours, December 7, 1943, the Italians launched an attack, climbing up the southeast slopes of Mount Lungo in an effort to clear the hill of the enemy. They were met with heavy fire and were repulsed. Although they had suffered heavy casualties, they reorganized and made a second attack which resulted in a slight improvement of the line.

The 1st Battalion was placed in Division reserve and was moved to positions in the vicinity of Venafro on December 8th. Our 3rd Battalion reverted to regimental control on December 9th, and was moved to the Presenzano area. Company E, less one platoon, was detached from the 2nd Battalion and moved into position along the railroad track south of Mount Lungo to cover a gap in the Italian flank and to serve as security for artillery units. Before the 3rd Battalion, which had marched all night, had had time to bathe or rest, it became necessary to send Company L, with a section of guns from Company M, to a position alongside of Company E. The remainder of the battalion was able to bathe, and then was moved into reserve southeast of Mignano.

All elements of the 2nd Battalion were directed to prepare to participate in an attack on the San Pietro heights, which was scheduled for December 15, 1943.

On the morning of December 14th, eight German planes bombed and strafed the regimental command post, causing several casualties. The Regimental Commander was evacuated with multiple body wounds. Enemy planes were again over the area during the afternoon and bombed the position occupied by our armor which had moved northeast of Mount Rotondo to support the proposed attack.

Moving under cover of darkness, the command post was displaced forward and located at the southern base of Mount Rotondo. Company F and Company G moved to positions south of the stream line which lay approximately three-quarters of a mile north of Rotondo. Company E remained in position, constituting the battalion reserve. The 3rd Battalion moved into positions vacated by the readjust-

ment of the 2nd. It was from their new position that the 2nd Battalion was to launch its attack on San Pietro.

The objective of our attack, San Pietro, was an old Italian village situated on the southern slopes of Mount Sammucro at the extreme eastern end of the Rapidan Valley. The approaches to the town consisted of a series of fortified terraces—walled olive orchards which had been stripped bare by incessant artillery fire during the month of November. We knew the Germans had automatic weapons disposed in depth and placed to cover each terrace on the approaches to the village. These lines were strongly supported by mortars and artillery. All emplacements were well constructed and protected overhead by lumber, rock and soil which enabled the enemy to call mortar fire directly upon their own positions. The attack was to be coordinated with that of the 143rd Infantry Regiment, which was to assault from the high ground north of the San Pietro-Venafro road, and with a company of tanks which were to attempt entrance into the village by use of the road. As soon as the town was taken, the 142nd Infantry Regiment and the Italians were to launch an assault against the German positions on Mount Lungo. Our 2nd Battalion was to attack in a column of companies down the narrow defile between the base of Rotondo and the terraced slopes, overrun the enemy defenses and enter the village from the southeast. Company G, reinforced with machine guns from Company H, was to lead the attack, followed by Company F, similarly reinforced. Armor located in the draw north of Rotondo would support the attack with direct fire.

The sun came out on the morning of December 15th and the skies cleared. It became warm, and we became wet with perspiration underneath layers of winter clothing. With the clearing skies a number of enemy planes appeared and bombed and strafed the regimental command post, the field train and Cannon Company areas. Just prior to noon, our artillery began preparatory fires. Machine guns and the armor placed fires just forward of the line of departure. One soldier, observing the crack of hundreds of bullets overhead, the "ground swell" of the exploding artillery and the rain of spent fragments, remarked, "We never had a battle experience course as good as this in North Africa."

The attack, scheduled for 1200 hours, was delayed on account of the tanks. At 1250, the 2nd Battalion Commander called his alerted companies by phone: "You attack in nine minutes."

"Does that mean whether you call us back or not?"

"Yes."

The prearranged signal went to the waiting platoons: "Let's go into town where we can spend our money."

Enemy fire, sensing the beginning of the assault, replied immediately. A mor-



CASSINO — SAN PIETRO AREA



tar shell exploded in the command group of the lead company, wounding the 1st Sergeant and the Company Commander. The Sergeant was evacuated, but the Company Commander, only slightly wounded, remained to direct the attack.

It was necessary for our troops to cross an open area about 125 yards wide before penetration of the enemy fortifications could begin. The Germans reacted vigorously, bringing cross fire to bear on the assaulting platoons from several machine guns. Dead and wounded marked the route of advance. By the time the first terrace had been taken the loss of leaders and the deadly intensity of the defender's fire had caused a complete dissolution of the assault formation. Before the shattered unit could be reorganized, one of our tanks rounded the curve above the terrace and the platoons were again ordered forward in an attempt to enter the embattled village with the armor. Just as the elements of one of our platoons entered the edge of San Pietro, the supporting tank, caught squarely by enemy fire, lurched from the road and crashed to the slope, enveloped helplessly in dust.

The lines of our men broke; the fire of their guns slowed. Some wavered and some fell back. The ground seemed to rise and settle with the violence of the explosions. A pall of smoke and dust gathered over the contested area and reduced visibility. In between the noise of the bursting shells could be heard the liquid crack of enemy weapons and our duller sounding guns. Ears ached from the concussion, and the pungent odor of exploding shells filled the vibrating air.

Runners returning to the rear were killed or wounded and displacement of machine guns was delayed. An enemy artillery shell hit the G Company command group, seriously wounding the radio operator, the weapons leader and the Company Commander. Attempts were made to call the Battalion Commander by radio in order to report the situation and ask for artillery support. The radio had been impaired and the attempt failed. The wounded leaders attempted to reorganize the company to continue the attack. Company F was ordered to attack without delay in an attempt to relieve Company G, whose Company Commander, unable to effect reorganization in the face of relentless fire, was evacuated. Almost immediately, the Commander of Company F was killed by rifle fire.

Company F, assaulting directly into the blazing guns of the enemy, unmindful of the rising cost in dead and wounded, was able to reach the outer defenses. Concentration after concentration of enemy mortar fire was directed into the area. The lines became intermixed and our formations dissolved in the confusion of battle. Lack of communication made it impossible to continue the attack. Fighting individually and in groups of two or three, the men held desperately to their ground.

At 1730 hours, Company E, with a partly reorganized Company F, attempted to advance up the terraced slopes. What remained of Company G stayed in position. This advance was again repulsed by the enemy. At 2000 hours, the battalion

was directed to reorganize and continue the attack under cover of darkness. At this time Companies E, F and G did not have enough men left to constitute one rifle company. Thirty-four men were left out of the company which had led the initial assault.

The attack was resumed at 0100 hours, Company E and Company F again in the assault. Elements of the two companies succeeded in penetrating the edge of San Pietro, neutralizing several German positions and destroying one ammunition dump, before overwhelming fire forced their withdrawal.

Despite the large number of casualties, the battalion launched still another assault at 0600 hours. Company L had been attached to our depleted Second Battalion with orders to enter San Pietro from the west if the battalion succeeded in clearing the Germans from the southern slopes. The battalion moved within 200 yards of their objective before the attack was broken by intense machine gun fire and anti-personnel mines which were thickly planted in the area. Daybreak found the battalion, completely shattered, in the open and exposed to the searching sniper and machine gun fire of the enemy.

The establishment of a defensive position under the cover of smoke was begun at 0730 hours. At 0940 hours, the battalion was ordered to move back past the line of departure. Due to the complete disruption of all communication, the order was not delivered until 1230 hours and could not be accomplished until 1530 hours.

By 1545 hours, December 16, 1943, we were advised that the 142nd Infantry Regiment and the Italian units had taken all of Mount Lungo. Our 1st Battalion, which had not been in the line since December 7th, moved into position on the mountain northeast of San Pietro on the night of December 16-17th along the flank of the 143rd Infantry Regiment, which had been unsuccessful in its attempts to advance. Our patrols entered San Pietro on December 17th and found that the Krauts had withdrawn during the night. Two wounded men from Company G were found in the village, having been in San Pietro since the first assault of the Company.

Under cover of darkness, the 3rd Battalion completed relief of the 2nd. At 0830 hours on December 19th, our 3rd Battalion began its advance beyond San Pietro to C. Morello, which was reported by Division to be lightly held. The battalion was almost on its assigned objective when it made contact with the enemy. Company K attempted an envelopment of the ground from the right, but was repulsed. We found that the ground was held by two enemy companies with at least 20 machine guns.

The 2nd Battalion moved into a position southeast of C. Morello and was assigned several patrol, contact and counterattack missions.

At 1730 hours, December 20, 1943, the 3rd Battalion started for the Mount



Sammucro trail. The field train was moved from Presenzano to a new area approximately two and one-half miles southwest of Venafro. Since the move was made in heavy rain which had turned the roads and fields into quagmires of mud, there was a delay in supplying the units and our 3rd Battalion was held up over an hour until rations could be delivered to the men. It was 2115 hours before our 3rd Battalion was able to begin its climb up the rocky slopes of Mount Sammucro. The trail was very steep and cratered and the incessant rain had made the path extremely slippery. Shortly after midnight the Germans placed artillery and machine gun fire on the advancing column. The fire caused the column to break from the trail and considerable confusion and dispersal of men resulted.

A carrying party of 120 men, newly arrived as replacements and detailed to carry supplies to our 1st Battalion, lost contact with guides and returned to the bottom of the hill.

The 3rd Battalion reached a point approximately 350 yards from Hill 730, its march objective, at 0220 hours. It was to attack from Hill 730, moving southwest, and capture San Vittore at daybreak. Upon arrival at this point, Company B, which had been assigned the job of clearing the enemy from the hill, was still engaged in a fire fight. The trail route received increasing machine gun fire, and it became impossible to maintain control of the units and continue the march. At 0325 hours orders were issued for the 3rd Battalion, less Company K, to return to the point of departure. Communications had been disrupted by enemy fire and it was not until 0500 hours that the order was received. Daylight came and the battalion completed its withdrawal under the cover of smoke and began to prepare concealed positions at the bottom of the slope at 0815 hours.

Company B had been unable to unseat the Germans from Hill 730 and heavy casualties experienced by the unit forced its withdrawal. The hill had been reported by Division as being lightly held, but was later confirmed to be defended by over 200 men whose emplacements included pillboxes and numerous machine guns covering the approaches. Company K was attached to the 1st Battalion to remain in positions formerly occupied by Company B.

Company K was returned to the 3rd Battalion on December 22nd, and by 1159 hours on December 23rd, the battalion relieved two battalions of the 143rd Infantry Regiment northeast of San Pietro.

Our 1st Battalion was attached to the Special Service Force on December 22nd and occupied Hill 730 after it was taken by an assault of the latter unit on December 25th. The 1st Battalion of the 143rd Infantry Regiment was attached to our regiment and relieved our 2nd Battalion just prior to midnight of Christmas Day. Our 2nd Battalion then moved back to bivouac near the field trains. On the 28th of December the battalion, followed the next day by our 1st Battalion,

moved to the San Angelo d'Alife rest area. They were joined on December 30th by the 3rd Battalion and the remainder of the regiment, after relief had been completed by the 135th Infantry Regiment of the 34th Infantry Division.

With the end of December, 1943, came the end of our fight to clear the Mignano Gap. The Germans were falling back from the bitterly contested area to their lines on the Rapido, the Garigliano and the strongpoint at Cassino. Our operations, with the exception of our costly efforts at San Pietro and the operations around Hill 730 and C. Morello, had been defensive. Days and nights had been marked by endless patrolling, eternal vigilance at our outposts, the incessant thunder of artillery, the whine of the Luftwaffe, and the mud and the rain and the weary bitterness of always another hill to climb. From the wind and the cold where each advance was measured in yard after soggy yard at the cost of lines of wounded and the broken bodies of our heroic dead, from the scarred hills of battle, we turned gratefully to a rest, hot food, a bath and clean clothes.

The enemy had called us "wild men from Texas, skilled in fieldcraft and fighting".

We would meet him again.

*"The waves  
Of the mysterious death-river moaned;  
The tramp, the shout, the fearful thunder-roar  
Of red-breathed cannon, and the wailing cry  
Of myriad victims, filled the air."*

*Prenice*

#### IV

## *Disaster at the River Rapido*

On January 1, 1944, we were in a rest area near San Angelo d'Alife, Italy. Replacements of officers and men enabled us to be reconstituted at nearly normal strength. An intensive training program was instituted and continued until we were loaded again on trucks and started up Highway No. 6, the historic Via Roma, for relief of the 6th Armored Infantry Regiment on Mount Porchia. This was accomplished on the night of January 12th.

Mount Porchia was relatively small compared to the mountains typical of central Italy. Its importance was derived from its isolated position commanding the low ground lying between the Mount Maggiore-Camino hill mass to the south and Mount Trocchio to the northwest. Highway No. 6 cut across the lower northern slopes, extending to the north across the River Rapido at Cassino.

Orders were received on January 14th for us to attack with the 135th Infantry Regiment, 34th Division, on our right, seize Mount Trocchio and the area to the south and west, including La Pietra and the high ground beyond to the River Rapido. Mount Trocchio was located about three miles northwest of Mount Porchia, with its long axis following a northwest-southwest direction. It towered well above Mount Porchia and occupied a commanding position over the surrounding ground, guarding the approaches to the River Rapido and the southern and eastern approaches to Cassino. Its sides were extremely steep and rocky. La Pietra was a medium sized hill south of the southern slopes of the mountain proper. The surrounding area, including the area between Mount Porchia and Mount Trocchio, consisted of low, rolling terrain.

The coordinated attack was launched at 0630 hours, January 15th, with the 2nd and 3rd Battalions abreast and the 1st in reserve. Although determined resistance was put up by the enemy, especially along the southern sector in the vicinity of La Pietra and south towards Cesa Martina, the attack proceeded satisfactorily and by 0600 hours, January 16th, we had cleared our sector all the way to the river.

Patrols were sent across the river in preparation for a coordinated attack of the river line scheduled for January 20-21st. To our north, in the vicinity of Casino, the 34th Division was to demonstrate, but not attempt, a crossing. To our left, the 143rd Infantry Regiment was to cross the river south of San Angelo. We were to be supported by Corps artillery as well as our normal combat team and divisional guns. Other fires were to be had from our Cannon Company and Company A of the 2nd Chemical Battalion, which had the mission of screening with smoke shells on order.

Our crossing was to be attempted in the vicinity of the "S" bend of the River Rapido, about a mile west of the southern tip of Mount Trocchio and approximately in front of the middle of the sector we were occupying at the time. Companies A, B and C were to cross first by means of rubber assault boats and were to launch the attack at 2000 hours on January 20th. At 2100 hours, the rifle companies of our 3rd Battalion were to begin their crossing by means of foot bridges to be installed in the meantime, north and south of the "S" bend. Supporting weapons and battalion headquarters units of both battalions were scheduled to follow across on the bridges.

The Engineers had been directed to install an 8-ton infantry support bridge by 2400 hours on the night of the attack to enable anti-tank guns and vehicular traffic to cross. The Engineers were also charged with the duty of furnishing guides through the mine fields on the approaches to the crossing sites.

Our initial intelligence information indicated that the crossing was a hazardous operation. Both banks of the river were heavily laid with a wide belt of mines and covered by interlocking weapons fire, mortar concentrations and cleverly contrived obstacles with double apron wire fence on the enemy side. Trees had been cut to afford observation and lanes of fire. The stream's swift current swirled along at more than five miles per hour. The channel of water, while not over 45 feet wide, cut through vertical banks which were from three to four feet high, dropping away from the banks abruptly to a depth of from ten to twelve feet in the center.

The collapsible rubber boats proved inadequate for the crossing. The current was too swift and the boats capsized readily in the swirling water. Small shell fragments punctured the rubber, often rendering the boats useless while being conveyed from final assembly areas to the stream. Five of seven boats used by patrols from Company E on the night of January 17th had been lost.

During the daylight hours of January 20th, final preparations were completed. Engineering equipment was brought forward. Additional communication lines were laid to wireheads in forward areas. Eight carrier pigeons from the II Corps' loft were brought forward to be used in emergency.

The artillery barrage started during the afternoon and it seemed as if the entire world was being shaken to its very foundations. Over 31,000 rounds were poured into the enemy positions across the river—over one round for every six square yards of the target area. A bombing mission was flown at 1520 hours on the western side of the river north of San Angelo.

By 1800 hours, January 20th, the assault elements of the 1st Battalion began to move into final assembly areas for their boats and guides. Misfortune seemed to dog the weary footsteps of our veteran troops almost from the very start. Confusion became rampant. Enemy shells had destroyed several of the boats during the afternoon and many boat reassignments and readjustments had to be made. While proceeding from the boat dump to the crossing site, the Engineer guides with Company B lost their way and led the company several hundred yards past the proper place. While the column was being turned around, an enemy concentration landed in the area, killing the Company Commander and seriously wounding the second in command. The Engineer guides lost their way as the white tape marking cleared lanes was broken and destroyed by exploding shells, and Company A was led into a mine field and stranded. The Commander was seriously wounded and the second in command took over the confused company and attempted to contact battalion. His efforts were unsuccessful. When elements of the 3rd Battalion began to pass, the second in command attached the company to them and awaited installation of the footbridge.

Following the earlier disorganization of Company B, two officers went to find a path through the mine fields to the river. They were unable to find an opening, and at 0230 hours, January 21st, the Battalion Commander led the company through to the vicinity of the "S" bend. Here the men attempted to launch assault boats. All efforts proved unavailing. The steep banks and the swift current made it impossible to get the boats into the river upright and prevent them from capsizing. Shell fragments destroyed two of the boats and the men were ordered to disperse in the area and await the footbridges.

The enemy's well coordinated defensive fires fell constantly. Mortar and artillery concentrations of great volume were directed into the site proposed for the crossing.

Reports from the 143rd Infantry Regiment on our left indicated they were experiencing similar difficulties. One company had succeeded in crossing in boats by 2243 hours, January 20th, but all attempts to install foot bridges had failed, and they were then attempting to improvise wooden bridges.

Our plans for the 3rd Battalion's footbridges were also beset by unfortunate incidents. Of the four bridges to be installed, one was defective and never taken from the dump. Another was destroyed in a mine field enroute to the river. The

third was destroyed by enemy artillery concentrations in the vicinity of the crossing site. There was left only one serviceable bridge which was finally installed under enemy fire. Companies A and B, followed by a few men from Company C, were rushed across the bridge before the incoming fire became so intense that it was necessary to abandon the bridge.

None of the 3rd Battalion elements had been able to carry out their schedule for crossing on the night of January 20-21st. Attempts to install the eight-ton infantry support bridge resulted in failure. At 0515 hours, January 21st, orders were received that all elements still on the near side of the stream were to be withdrawn to assembly areas before daylight, and the men who had succeeded in crossing were to be instructed to dig in at their present positions and hold. The Commander of our 3rd Battalion and his Operations Officer were seriously wounded at the site of the bridge crossing and had to be evacuated before withdrawal could be accomplished.

All contact with Companies A and B across the stream was lost by the morning of January 21st, and their whereabouts was never accurately determined. All attempts to establish communication proved ineffectual. The sound of friendly small arms fire heard during the day, however, indicated that the men had moved substantially inland from the river line. Bits of information received from several wounded men who had managed to work their way back during the daylight indicated that the units across the river had suffered great casualties. Constant shelling and accurate machine gun fire directed at all movement in their exposed position prevented effectual reorganization or further progress towards their objectives. All communication was hopelessly beyond repair.

The crossing was again attempted at 2100 hours, January 21st, by the 2nd and 3rd Battalions, with similar missions, equipment and plans. The 143rd Infantry Regiment was also going to attempt another crossing. Similar difficulties, due to mechanical failures and enemy fire, were encountered as had been experienced the night before. The assault boats were again inadequate. Numerous boats were lost in the swift current and many others rendered useless by mortar and artillery fire. The majority of men who made the crossing did so on improvised foot bridges, and by 0530 hours, January 22nd, foot elements of all units were across. Enemy mortar and artillery fire did not prove to be quite as intense or as concentrated as it had been on the previous night, but it became increasingly heavy toward morning.

All attempts to install a support bridge were unsuccessful. Efforts to install the original bridge were stopped at 2300 hours, January 21st, and the Engineers were ordered to bring up and install a Bailey bridge instead. Material for the bridge was in position by 0430 hours, January 22nd. Intense enemy fire met each

attempt to install the bridge, and although work on the bridge continued, it was never completed.

Before the arrival of daylight, over 300 smoke pots were placed along the river and ignited. During the day, additional pots were brought in to maintain the screen.

The 2nd and 3rd Battalions, once across, pressed forward toward their objectives. Beginning about daybreak, enemy fire of all types began to increase in intensity from the German defensive installations inland. Nevertheless, the men were able to penetrate the first organized German lines of resistance and to break through the barbed wire aprons strung through the open ground. These penetrations varied from 200 to 700 yards beyond the river. Beyond this distance, further advance was impossible, and the troops were forced to dig in on position. Well organized enemy fire swept the area constantly.

Throughout the day, advantage was taken of lulls in enemy firing to effect reorganization, which was difficult because of the lack of communication. At 1600 hours, January 22nd, the enemy began a series of counterattacks aimed towards annihilation of our forces on the far bank. The only information available on these attacks came from individual survivors, most of them wounded—one of them swimming the river after one foot had been completely blown off. Units, shattered and broken by the unbearable intensity of the fire, and greatly outnumbered, began to lose all signs of organization. By 1700 hours, the Commander and second in command of both the 2nd and 3rd Battalions, together with all the company commanders had either been killed or wounded.

The smoke haze laid down to screen reorganization activities and protect our men obscured observation and aided the enemy. The initial attacks of the Germans seemed to be made by about two companies, and were followed by a complete enemy encirclement of our beleaguered forces. Hard, bitter fighting repulsed these assaults as well as several additional attempts to overrun our positions. The enemy was able, however, to gain a well defined concept of our relatively confined area, and saturated our positions with repeated concentrations of artillery, mortar and automatic weapons fire. At 2240 hours, January 22nd, the Engineers were finally directed to abandon their fruitless efforts to construct a bridge.

American small arms fire was heard as late as 2300 hours that night. The greater portion of our veteran fighting team had disappeared into the blazing muzzles of death. The supreme effort of 48 hours, hours filled with shot and shell, violence and death, had been costly. Few blood soaked pieces of earth have exacted so high a price in the inflated economy of war. "You will stay there until you die."\* They did.

\* Reported to be one of the last orders transmitted to the troops across the river.

Almost a thousand never came back.

Surviving elements of the regiment, supplemented by a few who had been able to return, effected what reorganization they could on the east bank of the river. During the afternoon of January 22, 1944, one of our aid men had returned to the command post, with a note purportedly from the enemy commander, asking for a cessation of supporting fires for several hours to enable them to evacuate German and "English" wounded. Our man had been captured the morning of January 21st and had been attending wounded in a room of a farm house within the enemy lines. He stated that large numbers of fresh replacements had arrived to support the enemy during the day. Because of the informal nature of the note, it was interpreted as an attempt to secure relief from our artillery fire and was disregarded.



Efforts to send patrols across the stream on the night of January 22nd were unavailing due to the enemy control of the banks and the approaches to the east. Although patrols were sent out on the nights of the 23rd and 24th, no contact with friendly forces was made.



On the morning of January 25th, our aid men, carrying large Red Cross flags, crossed the Rapido in full view of the enemy. They were met by German officers and enemy aid men who asked for a truce in order to remove the dead. Artillery was instructed not to fire and by 1700 hours three of our wounded and 50 of our dead had been evacuated. Hostile action was then resumed.

The Germans who came out into the area maintained a helpful attitude, although they refused to allow our men to go beyond the barbed wire aprons strung about 500 yards inland. The information our men gathered of the well constructed and strongly manned enemy positions corroborated previous information received from patrols. The Germans didn't seem to understand why our bridgehead had continued to hold out so desperately. "Your men fought with great determination and courage," they told us.

The period January 25th to February 6th was spent in improving the defense position manned on the near bank of the river. By progressive relief of all units of the regiment we patrolled laterally and across the river. On February 6th, all battalions had closed into a new assembly area between San Vittore and Cervarro east of Highway No. 6. Plans made for another crossing of the River Rapido were contingent upon success of the 34th Division in its efforts to take Cassino.

In preparation for the proposed crossing, the command post was moved to La Pasternelle on February 7th. This small village was two and a quarter miles southwest of Cassino.

On February 8, 1944, we were notified that plans for crossing the Rapido had been abandoned.

Ours was the bitterness that characterized the winter fighting in Italy. An attempt to accomplish too much had been attempted with too little. Assistance had not arrived too late—it had not arrived at all. Our men had illuminated with heroic sacrifice the traditional honor of their arms.

*"But by-and-by will the deed and the plan  
Be judged by the motive that lieth below."*

*Lewis J. Bates*

V

## *The Fight for Monte Cassino Abbey*

All attempts of the 34th Division on our right to capture the stronghold of Cassino had been unsuccessful. Nonetheless they had succeeded in capturing the northern end of the valley formed by the eastern rim of the low ground and were occupying a salient in the Mount Caira-Cassino ridges along with a few houses in the outskirts of Cassino at the northwest entrance to the town. The enemy, however, was firmly entrenched along the southern and western heights, holding Mount Cassino. The historically famed Abbey of Mount Cassino, home of the Benedictine Monks, straddled the very tip of the mountain, commanding the eastern and southern approaches to the ancient village at its base.

The Germans had occupied the Abbey, using it for observation and defense. Possession of this virtually inaccessible bastion rendered success of any tactical movements through the low ground to the south extremely unlikely. The only means of circumventing this enemy advantage lay in the capture of the edifice by storming the heights or rendering it untenable by reduction to rubble through the use of siege guns and destructive bombings. While the Allied world debated the propriety of the destruction of this ancient shrine, our forces pursued the plan of capturing it without reduction, suffered considerable casualties—and attained no success. Each day of combat was reduced to its simplest components of slugging it out with the enemy while separated from him by no more than a door, a wall, a pile of rubble, the length of a bayonet—the simple measure of battle that spans the narrow way between the living and the mute companionship of death.

"How are things going?" we asked a haggard leader of a squad who had spent more than 20 days in the embattled ruins of Cassino. He replied in a colorless, low monotone, his voice betraying an ageless weariness. Only in his eyes was there the least flicker of his wry emotion. "We have a line which occupies one room in the Continental Hotel. With the moral support of the people back home who don't want the Abbey destroyed, and at the bloody price of several more of their sons, we are gonna push our outposts into the kitchen."



On February 8, 1944, we received notice that we would move to the vicinity of Caira, a village at the base of the 34th Division's salient, relieve elements of that Division, and join other elements of these famed "Red Bull" men in a coordinated effort to unseat the enemy from the Mount Cassino ridge, envelope the Abbey from the north and east, and capture it by infantry assault. The relief was accomplished by the night of February 9-10th.

The road to Caira was a tortuous trail of mud and eroded ditches. The only means of access to the town and the salient which had been secured in the mountains involved working north along the eastern rim of the valley from San Vittore through Cervarro and San Michele to Portella, and then doubling back toward the southwest into the valley. The route then turned south along the eastern edge of the low land, almost to Cassino itself, cut west across the valley floor, crossing the Rapido near the Italian barracks at Villa, and finally north along the base of the mountain mass into Caira.

The continuous rains of February 8-11th had loosened the soft surface of the roads and rendered them almost impassable. Some sections had a foot of mud on their surface. The entire route from Cervarro was under clear observation from the Abbey, and many points, particularly the crossroads, were impact areas sub-

jected to accurate enemy artillery concentrations. Where the route passed across the floor of the valley, it was virtually under the towering observation posts the enemy maintained in the Abbey and surrounding heights.

The attack, at 1100 hours, February 11th, had to be launched from the uncertain positions gained along the slopes south of "Snake's Head" Ridge. These positions, reported clear by other units, were actually secured by fighting when the regiment moved into position. The 1st Battalion, coordinated with other attacking elements, began its advance at the appointed hour. Extremely heavy fire of all types was encountered. The chief obstacle consisted of enemy fire directed into our flank from German positions to the west. No means had been provided for countering or evading the fire. Only short gains were made, primarily by crawling along the barren and rocky surfaces of the ridge and dislodging the enemy from his positions with hand grenades. The fierce close-in struggle continued through the afternoon. Over 1300 hand grenades were used by the battalion during the fight.

The Germans launched two counterattacks, one of severe intensity at 1200 hours and one of smaller proportions at 1600 hours. While both of these attacks were repulsed with heavy losses to the enemy, their total effect was to neutralize our efforts to advance, and our position remained relatively the same throughout the afternoon.

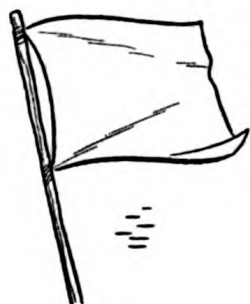
Our regiment, which had never recovered from the losses at the River Rapido, now had a fighting strength in the 1st Battalion of but 10 officers and 66 men while in the 3rd we had only 12 officers and 94 men. These two depleted battalions were combined as one unit and instructed to hold present positions, keeping in close touch with the enemy by constant patrolling.

The large number of casualties suffered during the initial occupation and during the attack accentuated the difficult problem of evacuation of wounded from the mountains. Additional litter teams were provided from the Cannon and Anti-Tank Companies and from a group of replacements. To bring one wounded man from the positions in a litter often took a reinforced team of six men from eight to nine hours.

We were not alone in suffering casualties. The enemy, bleeding from our hammering assaults, asked for a truce in order to remove his dead. We watched him remove over 160 German bodies from the area.

One of the most critical aspects of the fighting in the vicinity of Mount Cassino and "Snake's Head" Ridge, in the Mount Caira-Cassino salient, was the supply problem. A forward supply dump was established by us near Portella on a forward slope under enemy observation from the heights. This was as far along the route as it was feasible to use our Nighthawk trucks which came in under

the cover of darkness. From here the supplies were moved by mule trains into the valley, across the valley floor, and up into the mountain positions, where final distribution points had been established for hand-carry still farther up the rugged slopes.



The trucks were dispatched in the early afternoon from the field train area near San Pietro, loaded at various Army and Division supply points, and arrived at our forward dump at darkness after going through San Vittore, Cervarro, and San Michele. Normally, this route would have been covered in two or three hours. The impassable condition of the muddy, narrow and circuitous road, dubbed the

“Rasta Route” by the Engineers, often lengthened the trip to six or seven hours.

Relaying supplies from Portella was the hardest part of the operation. On the night of February 10-11th, during the initial movement into position, we were unable to get enough mules to handle the bulk of supplies. Of the 150 mules promised by Division, only 46 arrived at the newly established mule park near the forward dump. About half of these had been walked for 30 miles during the day and were in no condition for use during the night. Every attempt was made to secure more and some were borrowed from another regiment. Around 0200 hours, February 11th, a train of 55 mules had been organized, loaded and started on the road.

All trails in the precipitous slopes and ridges had to be travelled at night. Almost all the route, and particularly the part leading across the valley floor, was under observation and subjected to enemy fire. Dispersal of the mules was impossible because of the single road through heavily mined fields, and guides had to maintain contact along the trails leading into the slopes.

Almost inconceivable difficulties had to be overcome in order to scale the mountain sides. The rains had loosened the thin covering of mud on the rocky trails, leaving them slippery invitations to death and injury. Along many stretches, footholds were virtually impossible. In many instances, ropes were tied to men in echelon to assist in scaling the heights.

During the first nights of the operation, most supplies and equipment were hand-carried into position because of the inaccessibility of the forward positions to mule transport. Several trucks were rushed across the valley and supplies dumped at the base of the mountain where transfers were made. German concentrations



fell in the area and made further use of trucks inadvisable. Accurate mortar fire covered the trails, wounding many men and causing considerable disorganization. Unfamiliarity with the terrain and darkness complicated the task. Some places in the trail were littered with dead mules.

Men to handle the supplies were taken largely from the unlettered units, although these men were allowed some relief by the use of replacements. The entire trip with the mules consumed all the hours of darkness and was so arduous that men or mules could not perform the task satisfactorily every night. Since the mule park was also under sporadic fire from the German artillery, sleep or rest during the daytime was extremely difficult.

On the night of February 14th, the leader of the mule skimmers approached the Regimental Supply Officer just before the mule teams started out with their loads for the mountains. His shoulders were stooped from fatigue and his eyes, blood-shot from lack of sleep, were sunk deep into his long, unshaven face.

"Sir," he said, "I believe I can make it up that mountain and back by day-break, but all my men and all the mules have been up for two nights in a row already. This is their third night. I'm afraid I'm gonna lose some of them tonight from exhaustion."

The supply officer thought for a minute. He would have over 100 new men from replacements available the next morning. They were green at the job but they were fresh. "Tell me," he addressed the Lieutenant, "if you told the men that after they get back tonight they will have tomorrow night off where they can bathe and rest—if you tell them that, do you think they can make it tonight?"

"Wal-l-l," the leader of the mule skimmers answered slowly, "if I tell them that, Sir, I believe they can make it."

The officer moved toward the door of the ancient stone house and pulled his mackinaw closer around his stooped shoulders before stepping out into the rain and darkness. He was almost past the blackout blanket when he turned and paused. "Captain," he said, smiling slowly, "what will I tell the mules?"

The period February 13, 1944 to February 27, 1944, was one spent in clinging tenaciously to our defensive positions in the cliffs. Our offensive capabilities were at an end. Our enormous casualties, both battle and non-battle, during the River Rapido disaster and our unsuccessful attempt to unseat the Germans from the Mount Cassino ridges had left of us nothing but a skeleton unit. We held desperately to the little unit integrity that was left in the battered regiment. And always with us was the wind, the snow and the cold. And always the rain ... the slippery paths ... the uneasy rocks ... the towering slopes ... the mules ... and the mountains of Italy.

We needed relief by a fresher unit in order to have time to receive replace-



ments and rebuild. But, for the time, no relief was in view. We were to carry on—or the costly gains of the winter past would become even more costly.

Our casualties continued to mount. At 1645 hours, February 13, 1944, the command post at Cairra received a direct hit from a 150 mm. artillery shell. The round ricocheted from the roof of the adjoining building and plowed into the top of the sandbag protection across the entrance door to the operations room and exploded on contact. The Regimental Commander, standing in the doorway, was killed instantly. The Regimental Executive Officer was seriously wounded and the entire enlisted personnel of the operations section had to be evacuated. On February 15th, the enemy shot 18 rounds of self-propelled fire into the forward supply dump, causing considerable loss of supplies. During the same day, over 700 rounds of enemy fire fell in the Cairra village area.

When Division called the newly constituted operations section and complained that shell reports were not being kept up to date to assist the Division Artillery in plotting counterbattery fires, the weary clerk replied, "Look, I'll just hang the phone outside the window and you can count them as they come in."

We watched the bomb reduction of Cassino and the Abbey, the shattering crash of the siege guns pounding the rubble, and the following attacks of British and New Zealand units which added another to the list of unsuccessful attempts to unseat the enemy.

And we repeated the story of the British General who visited the New Zealand units who had hit Cassino on our left—troops famed for toughness in battle as well as disregard for "polish".

"I say," the General spoke to the commander of the troops, "your men are a bit lax on discipline. They don't salute me."

"They don't salute me either, General. Have you tried waving at them? They are friendly and will wave back!"

These Allied troops, with the dry humor of those who face death unafraid, marked the craters in their lines where our bombs had fallen short: "American Precision Bombing".





Going to the latrine outside the house became known as "Operation Purple Heart". One soldier remarked, "I don't mind being caught with my pants down, but I don't want to get hit that way."

On the night of February 26-27th, we were relieved by the 2nd Battalion of the 351st Infantry Regiment of the 88th Division. Nothing meant very much to us that cold, rainy morning of the 27th when we came down out of the mountains, nothing much but the importance of putting one weary foot past the other weary foot and moving on through the cold mud to the trucks waiting for us in the vicinity of the forward supply dump. After a hot bath and the luxury of a night's sleep on a dry blanket—well, after that, there would be time enough to remember other things and to feel the meaning of something again.

\* \* \*

A headstone marks the farthest advance of our regiment on the southern front. Long after Cassino had fallen, it was noticed at the right side of the road on Highway No. 6, just before you enter the village of rubble:





*"Veni, vedi, vici."*  
*Julius Caesar*

VI

## *Velletri and the Fall of Rome*

When relieved from positions in the mountains north of Cassino, we moved by truck to a rest area near Pratella. On March 6, 1944, we moved to Maddeloni, Italy, near the palace of Caserta, and near Naples, to begin an intensive rebuilding and retraining program. The program was continued with mountain training at Celzi, near Avellino and Salerno, where we remained from April 18, 1944 until we moved to Qualiano, north of Naples, on May 8, 1944. We were ready for commitment in the Fifth Army offensive which was to meet with greater success than we had before experienced in Italy.

We closed into our assigned area at the Anzio Beachhead on May 22, 1944, moving in LST's, LCI's and other landing craft from Naples to Anzio. Our 36th Division was in VI Corps reserve initially. The attacks launched by the American Fifth and British Eighth Armies on the southern front on May 11, 1944, had met with considerable success. Our troops there had overrun the famed "Gustav Line," Cassino had fallen, and advances had been made deep into the Liri Valley where they were engaged in the reduction of the "Adolph Hitler Line." Now a timed attack was launched from our foothold at Anzio, coordinated with the drive from the south, breaking out along the entire perimeter of the beachhead, with the objective of cutting Route No. 7, the famed Appian Way, and Route No. 6, Via Roma, the two main arterial routes of supply and escape for the Germans in the south.

Our arrival at the Anzio Beachhead could hardly have been called secret. "Sally," reliable as ever, broadcast her welcome to us.

Before us the beachhead at Anzio extended for about 14 miles, from the Moleto River along the north, south to the Mussolini Canal, varying in penetration from five to nine miles. The terrain was generally flat, rising gently and becoming more rolling as it stretched inland toward the ring of mountains that boxed it in against the sea.

Moving on the night of May 25, 1944, we left the area three miles northeast of Anzio and closed into position about one mile northeast of Cisterna. Soon after moving into the new location, we began to shift into a defensive position approximately two-thirds of a mile north of Cisterna and running generally north and south between the Castle and Cisterna River beds, along a newly constructed trail known as the "Purple Heart Path."

"HELLO, ALL YOU BRAVE  
AMERICANS! THIS IS SALLY -  
... 36ERS - YOU CAN SEW  
ON YOUR T-PATCHES -  
WE KNOW YOU'RE  
HERE ....



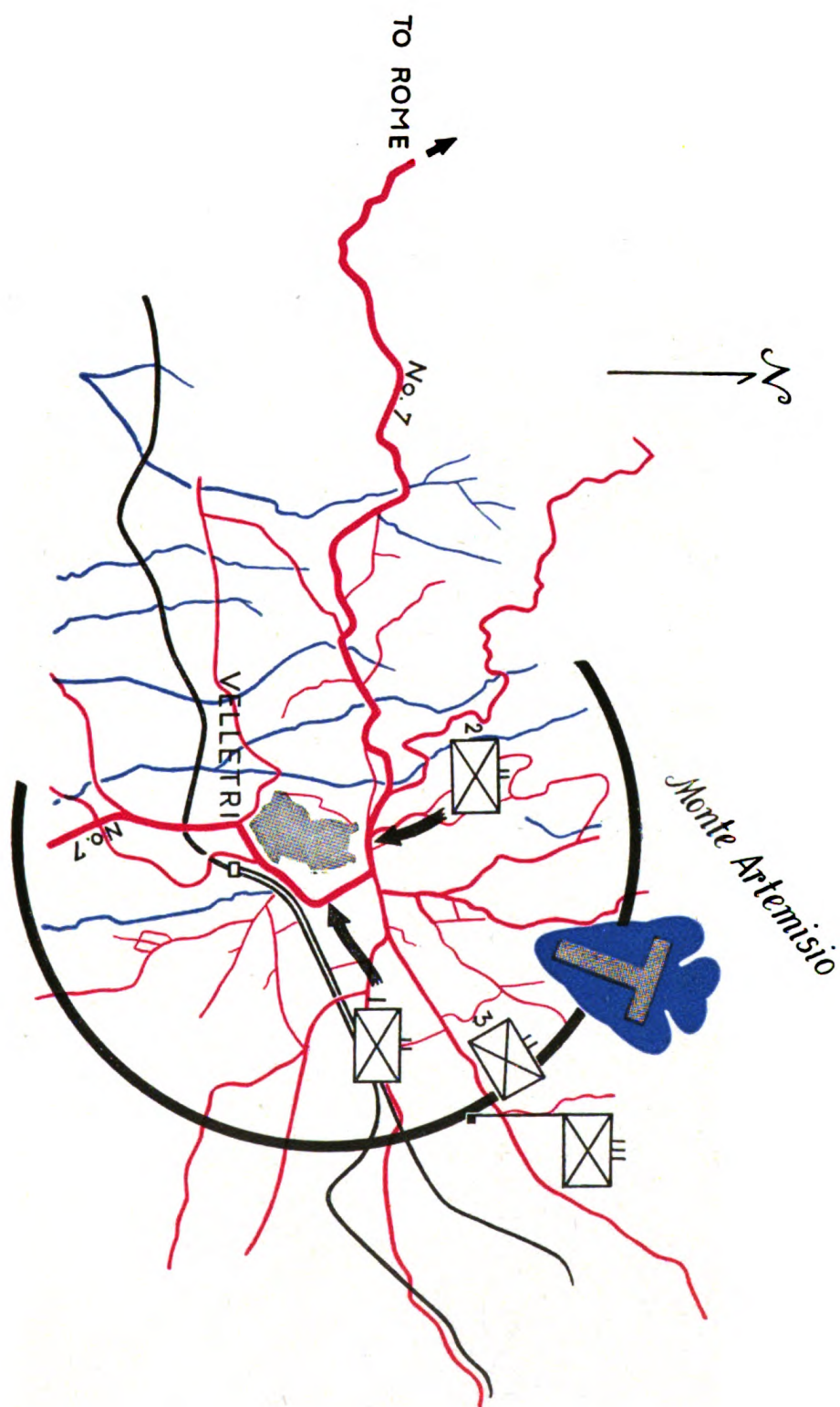
On May 27, 1944, we began to advance gradually in the sector in the direction of Velletri, in order to maintain contact with elements on our right. The advance was made by alternate displacement of battalions which were encountering only light resistance. On May 28, 1944, we took 18 prisoners after only brief skirmishing. On this date the line extended approximately southwest to northeast, about two and a half miles from the southeast corner of Velletri. The advance was continued after repelling two counterattacks supported by tanks, and on May 30, 1944, we were relieved in line by the 36th Engineer (Combat) Regiment, in preparation for execution of the Division Commander's plan for the envelopment of Velletri.

Our Division Commander, believing that the Lanuvio-Velletri-Artena line of the Germans was vulnerable, had conceived the brilliant and daring plan of infiltrating two regimental combat teams into the high ground northeast of Velletri. This was to be done through terrain without roads and through an enemy line believed to be lightly held. Our regiment, operating on the Division's left flank, was to by-pass Velletri to the north, cut off the enemy-held roads leading out of the city, and assault the strongpoint from two sides in a coordinated attack. One of our battalions was to maintain blocks on the Velletri-Valmontone road and secure the flanks of the Division during the infiltration of the other two regiments through the gap.

The movement of our battalions to accomplish our assigned mission was begun at 1600 hours, May 30, 1944. Slowly they advanced along the lower slopes of Mount Artesemo and north of the Velletri road against infiltrating enemy detachments and heavy artillery fire from Velletri. Snipers seemed to be everywhere.

The roads were dry and dust rolled in clouds behind our moving trucks and vehicles and settled in deep coats on our faces. While one of our liaison officers was at the Division Command Post, a sniper began shooting into the command group. The Commanding General, turning impatiently to his startled staff, started moving toward the sniper. "Come on. Come on. Let's go."

BATTLE OF VELLETRI





Our liaison officer jumped forward with his carbine. The General laid a restraining hand on the Lieutenant's shoulder. "What are you going to do with that, son?" he asked smilingly, indicating the carbine. "Are you going to club him with it?" The embarrassed officer looked down and saw his carbine was useless, having been completely choked with the heavy dust.

Our 1st Battalion, which had already started feeling out the enemy positions during May 31, 1944, launched a full scale assault against Velletri on June 1, 1944. In 24 hours of fighting the battalion threw 24 tons of ammunition against the town. After throwing back fierce resistance, they were able to penetrate the outskirts of the town at 1800 hours after the 2nd Battalion, overcoming similar resistance to the north of town, had begun its penetration of the town at 1200 hours. The 2nd Battalion was fighting from a position where it had been severed completely from its route of supply and evacuation. The 1st Battalion by-passed the town and took up positions west as the 2nd Battalion completed the mop-up of the fallen bastion by midnight of June 1, 1944.

Velletri was in shambles. The almost constant artillery falling on the town during the attack had left scarcely a building unmarred. Dead Germans, abandoned and shattered materiel, numerous knocked out tanks, vehicles and dead horses, debris and piles of rubble littered the streets. Numerous German wounded and dead were found in the houses. An excited Italian doctor rushed out to the troops and announced that he had delivered the first bambino to be born after the liberation and wanted to know if the child was an American citizen.

Our losses had been light compared to the intensity of the battle and the victorious result. Our dead, wounded and missing amounted to 339. But we had captured with the smooth sureness of fighting veterans the key strong point in the Velletri-Valmontone line. Enemy dead everywhere bore witness to the skill of our attack. We counted over 700 prisoners, and then, with our cage full and overflowing, lost count as others were simply directed down the road to Division and Corps cages in large groups, despondently defeated and unguarded. Over 340 decorations were awarded later to the personnel of the regiment for their gallant action at Velletri. It was the greatest victory we had experienced in Italy. After the disaster at the Rapido and the bitterness of the winter campaign, we had at last an opportunity to see our proud enemy humbled and surrendering in large groups.

Our victory at Velletri enabled our troops to crumble the entire Southern line. The beaten and disorganized enemy began to retreat. Since this was no time for us to rest, we took up the pursuit. This was the breakthrough. We moved rapidly to the hills due east of Lake Nemi. Our 3rd Battalion, followed by the 1st Battalion, continued advancing up the Velletri-Marino highway and prepared, on order,

# ...Somewhere on Via Roma...

to attack the Mount Alto hill mass. Four enemy planes bombed and strafed our 3rd and 1st Battalions, causing numerous casualties. A short while later, heavy artillery concentrations fell on the leading companies and caused considerable confusion and casualties.

The 2nd Battalion, having advanced along Highway No. 7 out of Velletri towards Rome, was relieved by the 157th Infantry Regiment, and rejoined us in position near Lake Nemi.

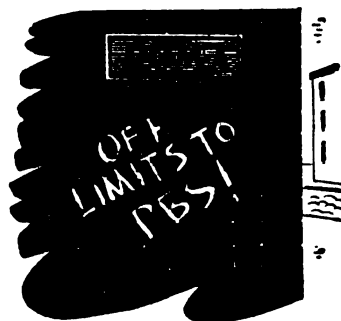
The Germans layed down many artillery concentrations, but no definite defensive positions were encountered. Scattered groups of enemy snipers continued to harass many units. Prisoners continued to drift back from forward positions.

Our 2nd Battalion, taking up the advance, overcame brief but bitter resistance from road blocks near Hill 660 and from the crossroads southeast of Lake Albano.

During the night of June 3-4th, information was received from Division that the German withdrawal had turned into a complete rout. Accordingly, our units were motorized as far as possible with kitchen trucks for the pursuit into Rome. After deploying two battalions to overcome the stubborn resistance at Marino, our columns pushed without difficulty into Rome.

As we began our victorious march through the capital city on the morning of June 5, 1944, the entire population seemed to line the streets. Silent at first and then, cheering lustily and crowding close to see our troops, they combined to give us the traditional Roman ovation. We crossed the Tiber River and moved south of Vatican City. Vehicles moved with difficulty down the narrow lanes of cheering Italians. Foot soldiers had difficulty in maintaining their columns. The jam of traffic and the tumultous ovation of the civilians prevented us from clearing the city until late in the afternoon. We moved into an area to the north of Rome for the night.

The reported reception of one Italian citizen of Rome was typical: "I hear the sounds of the guns and I say, 'Maria, you taka the bambino and go to the shelter.' All is quiet and I look into the street and I see



your iron wagons named 'Troppo Caro' and 'Tom Tom' and I say loud for Maria to hear, 'Come, it is the Americanos.' Have you got a cigarette?"

After a brief rest north of Rome and a stop at Lake Bracciano, meeting only spotty resistance during our marches, we stopped a few miles northeast of the Port of Civitavecchia. Beginning our move again, we arrived at Montalto Di Castro on June 9, 1944, and passed through the 361st Infantry Regiment on June 10th. After progressing rapidly, we were suddenly stopped by several vicious counterattacks which the Germans launched from what appeared at first to be only a lightly held road block south of Orbetello.

On June 14, 1944, we became the main element in Task Force Ramey and moved 51 miles northeast into Scansano, Italy. No opposition was encountered. The following day, our columns entered S. Caterina after overcoming a German roadblock near the village. Moving across country from S. Caterina, our elements moved west to Cana and thence by trails to the east-west road running out of Grosseto. This route was taken in order to arrive at a position from which an attack could be launched on Campagnatico to the northeast across the Ombrone River. This village was known to be occupied by the enemy.

Campagnatico was located on the top of a high hill and the Germans made excellent use of self-propelled artillery to deny our approach to the summit. The slopes were protected with machine gun fire and mine fields. Our supply route was through a ford over the river which had risen considerably due to heavy rains.

After sharp clashes on the slopes, we were able to enter the town by 1130 hours of June 18, 1944. The town following, Paganico, was assaulted immediately and taken on June 19, 1944 after a fierce encounter with enemy tanks and street fighters. Our advance then continued without incident until part of our elements were past Roccastrada. The 1st Armored Division then passed through us and we reverted to control of the 36th Division on June 25, 1944.

Our Division was then relieved and we returned to a rest area about eight miles northwest of Rome. With this relief, we saw the end of fighting in Italy. We had seen over 137 days of combat—combat under conditions as bitter as that seen by troops anywhere. We had suffered over 3,000 casualties in killed, wounded and missing. We had inflicted grievous injury on the enemy. Our grueling campaign had awarded us a great victory and the liberation of the first axis capitol, Rome.

With the pride of battles and the step of veterans, we turned to another task of training. There were still other battles to be fought. There were still other victories to be won before our enemy faced complete dissolution and complete defeat.

When the time came, we would be ready.

*"From wine what sudden friendship springs?"*

*Gay-fables*

## VII

### *Amphibious Assault on the Riviera*

Pre-invasion fever was raging in Naples during the month of July and early August. Day by day the fleet of destroyers, LCI's, LST's and miscellaneous amphibious craft built up in the harbor and more barrage balloons appeared over the dock area. Via Roma was a parade of battle famed patches that had written the early amphibious history of this war at Casablanca, Sicily, Salerno and Anzio. There was no effort made to conceal the fact that the 3rd, 36th and 45th Divisions were taking training under the amphibious-wise VI Corps. Adolph Hitler's tottering Wehrmacht had an exposed and soft underbelly in Europe, and we wanted him to know that it was going to be hit by the most veteran, hardest-hitting amphibious Corps that the United States Army had put afloat in this war.

Just off the beach at Salerno we lived under shelter halves, washed in helmets, took atebrine, cursed mosquitos and the powdered gray dust and wondered "when and where". July was a month of hard work that left no doubt in our minds as to what lay ahead. Under the hot sun of Southern Italy we had blasted beach fortifications with demolitions, blown barbed wire entanglements with bangalore torpedoes, run boat drills, loading drills, assault drills and attended schools on waterproofing vehicles. If we had any time free from training we managed to get into Pompeii and see the great ornate church and the ruins of old Pompeii or to go to Paestum and eat ice cream at the Red Cross Club.

Then we moved again. Loaded on trucks, we passed through Naples to a bivouac area just north of Pozzuoli where we camped in the fruit laden orchards where the dust seemed even deeper. The only good thing about the move was that we were a little closer to Naples and occasionally one of us received a pass into the metropolis. All the combat troops in Naples were wearing wool; the rear echelon cotton and saluting wasn't required of combat troops. Once in awhile you would see some GI wearing combat boots, wool and a Combat Infantryman Badge turn out a highball to a Lieutenant wearing wool and a Purple Heart with three or four clusters. There is an indescribable feeling of camaraderie that exists in the Infan-



try among men who have fought in the mud, sweated out the 88's and the burp guns together and eaten K rations day in and day out up at the front.

We saw a lot of the men from the 3rd and the 45th Divisions in Naples, drank a little cognac and vino, argued with each other and promptly attacked abreast any outsider who stuck his nose into our affairs. There was a feeling of solidarity amongst us that comes from the philosophy "this guy has got the same tough job ahead of him that I have".



At the end of the last week in July we combat loaded our individual equipment. The regiment landed in a dry run just south of Guagliano and we climbed our last mountain in Italy with the base plate of an 81 mm. mortar, a 300 radio or a tripod for a "heavy" on our backs.

On the night of August 9th, we were left with only the clothes on our backs; the last company jeep had gone to the waterproofing area and the kitchens were gone. This was no dry run! We loaded the morning of the 10th at Bagnoli and Pozzuoli and sailed out to Salerno and lay offshore as the invasion fleet built up around us. After loading we had no communications with the rest of the company who were not on our ship. The feeling of group solidarity narrowed down to the men on our particular craft. This narrowing process was to continue as we loaded into LCVP's a few days later.

Most of our regiment was combat loaded on LST's carrying eight or ten

LCVP's slung from the davits; a few LCI's carried part of the service and command echelon.

At daylight on the 12th the invasion fleet moved north along the coast. We all lined the rail or climbed up in the Higgins Boats to take our last look at Italy, remembering the day we first arrived there and thinking of all the men we had left behind. Nobody made much comment about being sad at leaving Italy. As we passed the tip of the Sorrento Peninsula, a bazooka man remarked that he'd like to hear that little dark-eyed gal sing "Tunra a Sorrento" again sometime. The LST farthest to the left passed close to the shores of Capri and a Lieutenant smoking a cigarette inhaled deeply, threw the butt into the wake of the ship and murmured, "Beauty dwells there, in Capri." But mostly the comments were expressions of relief. To most of us Italy had meant hard days of fighting, mountains, mud, filth and bitterness. Italy had been an inch by inch climb up the mountainous spine of a broken, dirty and disillusioned country where the advance guard of the great avalanche of American men of arms and equipment fought a disheartening, uphill war to give America the time she needed. Italy was a land of powdered gray dust, heavily burdened orchards, scrawny animals and stretching rows of White Crosses at Salerno, San Pietro and Anzio. No, there were few of us that felt any sincere regret as we lost sight of the lava strewn side of Vesuvius and turned our gaze toward the open blue Mediterranean.

Beyond lay a new task. The 141st Infantry had been designated to land three battalions abreast in the first wave of the impending invasion of Southern France, spearheading the veteran 36th Division.

D Day—15 August, 1944. H Hour—0800B!

D Day dawned a murky grey and a low fog lay off the coast of Southern France. Our radios the day before had picked up the news that Patton's Tanks had broken out of the Normandy Beachhead. For a fleeting moment we had hoped that our landing on a hostile shore, admittedly a difficult and usually costly operation, might somehow be discarded. The silhouette of the shoreline, four or five thousand yards away, in the first light, left no doubt in our minds as to what we were going to do that day. The coastline was unmistakably the one we had seen on the briefing maps and photographs. The high mass of ground projecting out into the sea was Cap Drammont, and outlined against the mainland was tiny Ile d'Or with a conspicuous stone tower that we had been told contained an enemy gun perched on its rocky top.

Looming up first as great dark blotches on the water and gradually assuming shape as daylight approached were the hundreds of naval vessels around us. Here, for the first time, we saw the great invasion fleet assembled.

By 0515 hours we had finished our fresh eggs and steak, the traditional "last

breakfast" the Quartermaster gives invasion troops, and were assembled on deck. It was still dark and quiet except for the creaking of winches as the assault boats were lowered into the water. Already stowed in the boats was the heavier gear—the machine guns, ammunition boxes, the waterproof radios, a few reels of light wire, beach demolitions, bangalores, bazookas, mortars and the waterproofed white cylinders containing the medical supplies that would be needed if the casualties were heavy. Individually we were stripped to the bare essentials—a couple of D Bars, a K ration, a canteen of water, a couple of bandoleers of ammunition slung around our necks and a few hand grenades hanging from our belts. Our rifles, carbines, BAR's and pistols had been carefully inserted into cellophane containers to keep the corrosive sea out of the the vital parts during the ship to shore phase of the landing.



It was still dark as we climbed over the side of the ships and down the rope nets into the LCVP's. By the time we were loaded it was getting lighter, but it was still quiet except for the sound of the boats scraping the iron gray sides of the ships as the assault boats rose and fell on the gently running sea. By six-thirty we were circling; at first just the nine boats from one ship, then the circle grew larger and larger as more and more LCVP's were filled with soldiers. By now it was broad daylight and the coastline was visible in detail as the great invasion force swung into action. Wave after wave of bombers came in low and began to saturate the beach with

their loads. At 0650 hours the naval preparation started with the battlewagons Texas and Arkansas rumbling into action. Then the famed cruiser Marblehead opened up and was joined by a half dozen destroyers immediately in back of us, all spewing tons of shells on the concrete emplacements, the coastal guns and the wire entanglements along the beach.

Now our boats straightened out into a line of V's made up of five boats each. Suddenly the motors took on a new deep throated roar and the square prows rose higher out of the water as we headed into the beach passing the slower LCM's, rocket launching craft, amphibious six by sixes carrying 105 mm. artillery howitzers mounted in a firing position, patrol crafts and finally the tiny minesweepers. At 4000 yards we passed the last control boat and heard a young Navy officer on

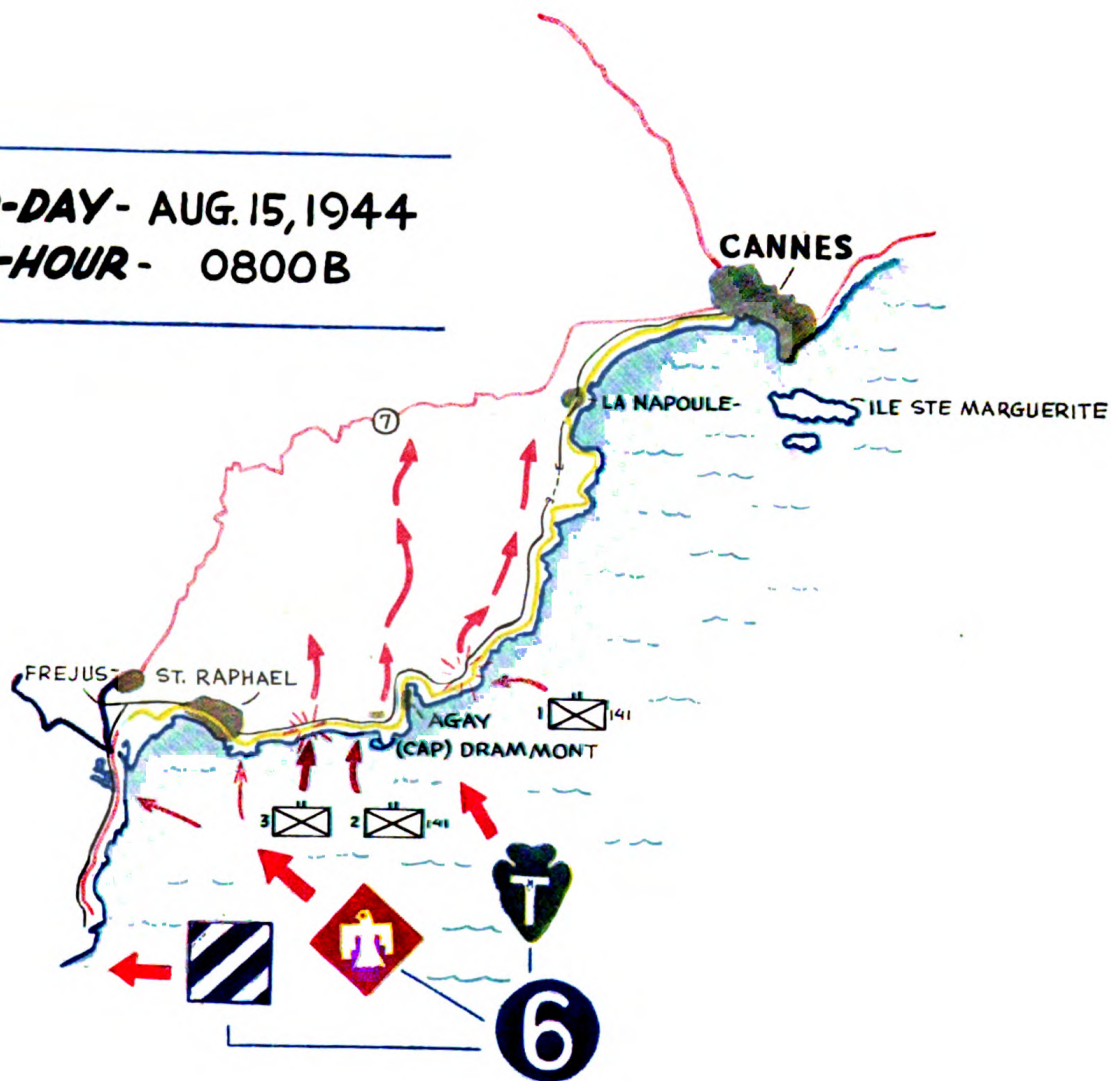
the bridge yell something through a loudspeaker. The skipper of our boat, a Brooklyn lad who had landed troops on Omaha Beach, looked at his watch and muttered, "on de nose." To a GI landing in the assault wave it is very important to hit the beach with dry feet. The axiom that old invasion troops follow is "get off the beach fast", and it's tough enough trying to move fast when you're loaded down with 90 pounds of equipment without having 100 pounds of water sloshing around in your shoes and pants. We had lots of confidence in this kid from Brooklyn when he said, "I'll put you guys on land wid dry feet if I lose my boat doing it."

Now we were 2000 yards offshore and the great rocket ships began to send their screeching cargo into the air. The sea was rolling lightly and the increased speed threw a fine salt spray into our faces. At 1000 yards the din of thousands of rockets and the shells crashing into the beach ahead became a steady roar in which the concussion caused by no single shell or group of shells could be heard. Now the water became rough and the boat lurched violently from side to side. The shore disappeared completely behind a heavy curtain of smoke, fog and spray. By now the feeling of anticipation and fear that is in every soldier's heart and mind as he approaches an invasion was gone. Two minutes to eight o'clock. The skipper opened the throttle on the powerful marine motor all the way ... quieter now ... occasional chatter of a machine gun ... a small, fast and heavily armed navy scout craft cut in on our right with its fifty calibers going wide open at a bulky object through the haze ... Ile d'Or ... the Navy was still throwing big shells farther inland beyond the beach. Suddenly a rocky coast loomed up ahead of us and the skipper yelled, "brace yourself!" as the boat crashed up on the rocky beach. There were machine gun bullets cracking over the gunwale and splintering the right side of the boat, but we didn't notice anyone getting hit. Within 40 yards of us two Sherman tanks, enclosed in a great boxlike canvas cover, churned up out of the water, instantly dropped the hood, like snakes leaving their skins, and rumbled off down the beach with their 75's blasting still belligerent minded German machine gunners out of existence.

So effectively had the Navy and Air Forces laid down their preparations that most of us dropped our demolitions and bangalores on the beach along with our unused lifebelts. We all had the same reaction that day—we were glad that we were Americans and fighting on a great winning team. Never before or since had we seen in one glimpse such an impressive demonstration of the combined might of arms that is America's Armed Forces—on land, on sea and in the air.

The task assigned the 1st Battalion is called a "scramble operation" by invasion soldiers because the Navy drops you on a beach that has cliffs and high hills all around it that won't permit the landing of any vehicles. It is strictly a job for the doughboy with his rifle.

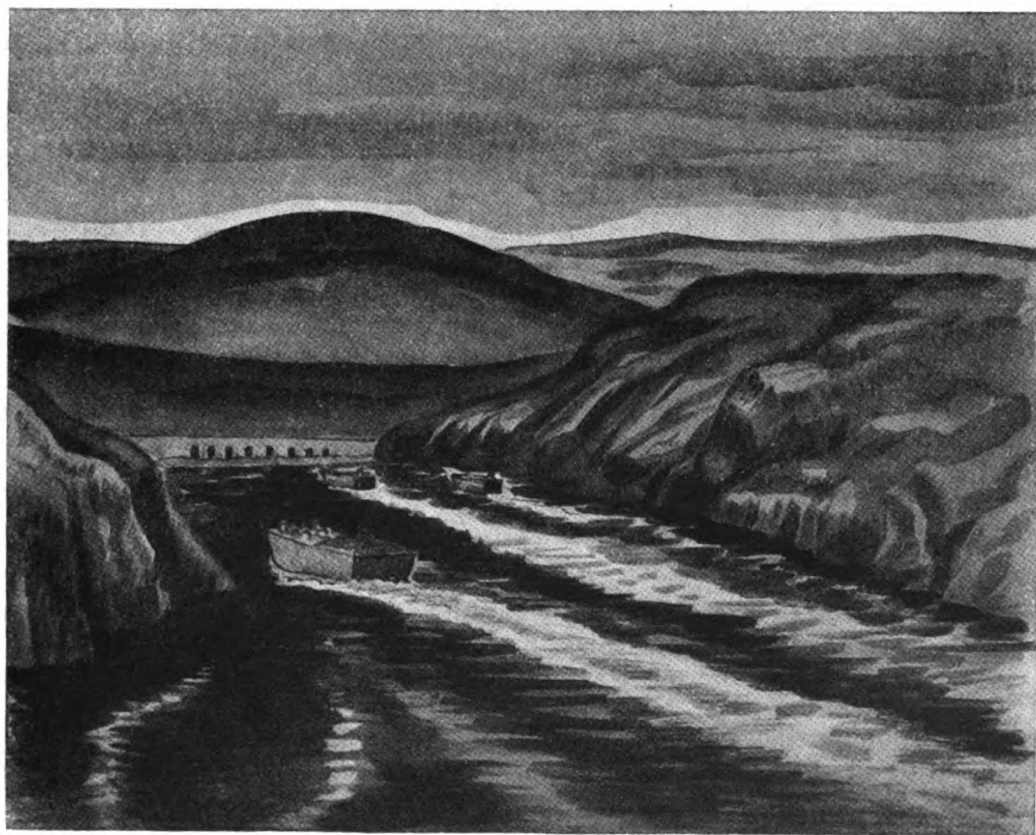
**D-DAY - AUG. 15, 1944**  
**H-HOUR - 0800B**







The 1st Battalion landed on a "scramble beach"; a place where there was really no beach at all, just high rocky cliffs all around that could only be traversed by foot soldiers equipped with only the tools of war that a doughboy can carry on his back. The beach was only 80 yards wide and the Navy didn't think that it would be wise to bring in more than three boats abreast. Some of our boats were blasted out of the water before we hit the beach. If the Navy hadn't delivered such effective gun fire during the preparation, we probably never would have been able to land the whole battalion on that little strip of rocky land. But we did. By noon we had enlarged the beachhead enough to clear the beach, contacted the 2nd Battalion on our left and picked up our armor which had come in over the 2nd Battalion beach. By dark we were working down the coastal highway toward Cannes, rolling up the coastal defenses that had not been blasted by the Navy. Few of the emplacements were designed for lateral defense and consequently Jerry organized strong points in almost every one of the beautiful pastel-shade villas that fringe the Mediterranean along that part of the French Riviera known as Cote D'Azur. The prisoners of war taken by those of us in the 1st Battalion during the



first three days equalled the strength of our battalion. Months later we were cited by the President of the United States for the action.

The 2nd Battalion landed on the 400 yards of rocky beach just to the west of Cap Drammont, cleared Cap Drammont, destroyed the radar station, seized the village of Drammont on the coastal highway and pushed up the Agay River Valley. By midnight on D Day the battalion had moved twelve miles inland from the beach and turned right to cut the main inland highway from Cannes to Frejus on the high ground just above Cannes.

The 3rd Battalion landed just to the left of the 2nd Battalion and drove straight inland from the beach to seize the high ground against little opposition.

For most of us the memory of D Day in Southern France is not too unpleasant. It had been a spectacular show. We had suffered few casualties and our regiment had taken the beach, over which the entire division landed, before midnight on D Day. Almost to a man we liked the first impression of France. D Day was warm and sunny and the reddish firm soil was a welcome contrast to the powdered ankle-deep dust of Italy. The air was filled with the odor of pines from the sparse coniferous growth that eeked out an existence from the arid mountain slopes that run down into France's famed Mediterranean Riviera.

During the next five days we continued to consolidate the right flank of the VI Corps beachhead as rumors began to trickle in. Things had gone equally well for the 3rd and the 45th Divisions. The French had landed behind the 45th and were driving on Toulon and Marseilles. Now that the beachhead was established we were going to be relieved. This rumor was to be with us for a long time; not until D Day plus a hundred and something had passed and we were still bitterly slugging it out in the Vosges Mountains did the subject of relief cease to be number one on the rumor parade.

Early on D Day plus one a 300 radio operator established the only contact with a group of paratroopers surrounded far inland who were asking for assistance. These men had dropped short of their target on D Day and were running out of ammunition, food and radio batteries. Many had been wounded and were in need of medical care. The paratrooper station identified itself as "Wounded Paratrooper". The next day a new station, "Wounded Paratrooper Two", came into the net, and the third day "Wounded Paratrooper Three". A task force made up of one company from the 1st Battalion and one from the 3rd Battalion, reinforced with a couple platoons of armor, moved north to Callian and Fayence and relieved the hard pressed paratroopers.

After the 1st Battalion had driven up the coast to La Napoule, a couple of active Jerry naval guns on Ile de Marguerite inflicted heavy casualties on the battalion before a couple of destroyers from the Navy raced brazenly into the Cannes





harbor and knocked them out. Artillery in the area just north to Cannes became more active as the days passed.

The 1st Airborne Task Force, composed of British and American paratroopers which had jumped near Le Muy, just north of Frejus and San Raphael on D Day, relieved us on D Day plus five and we assembled in Draguignan with most of the companies sleeping in a big school-house. Although on the right flank the

front had been stabilized right where it had been late on D Day, we were surprised to find that the left flank had been extended beyond all expectations. Quartermaster truck drivers rolling south with loads of PW's told us the front was up 100 miles when they had left. Information picked up from these truck drivers gave us a piece-meal picture of what was happening. "Maquis going wild ... the front was 100 miles up the road when I left it ... meeting no opposition ... Jerries surrendering by the thousands."

On the 21st of August we received our first real impression of the land we were liberating and the people who inhabited it. Almost without exception the impression was a good one and the contrast to Italy most striking. Always in Italy there had been the question; "Liberators or Conquerors?" The people of Italy, with their war torn, devastated country, had been just a backdrop for the saga of men attacking hill after hill—not to liberate a worthless rocky hill or a rubble and gutted village—but to kill that many more Germans and to get just one hill closer to the Third Reich Headquarters. This was different! Here were a clean and unquestionably sincere people whose entire heritage and tradition was one of freedom.

Probably no campaign of the war was more colorful and dramatic than the drive up through Southern France. Someone fittingly named it "The Champagne Campaign". As our Division drove into the Dauphine Alps the colorful and powerful FFI Underground Bands swung into action, harassing every movement of the stunned German forces and expediting our advance by knocking out small delaying forces of the enemy long before we reached them. Indelibly imprinted in our memories are the rows of happy, grateful faces, the waving of French, American and British flags.

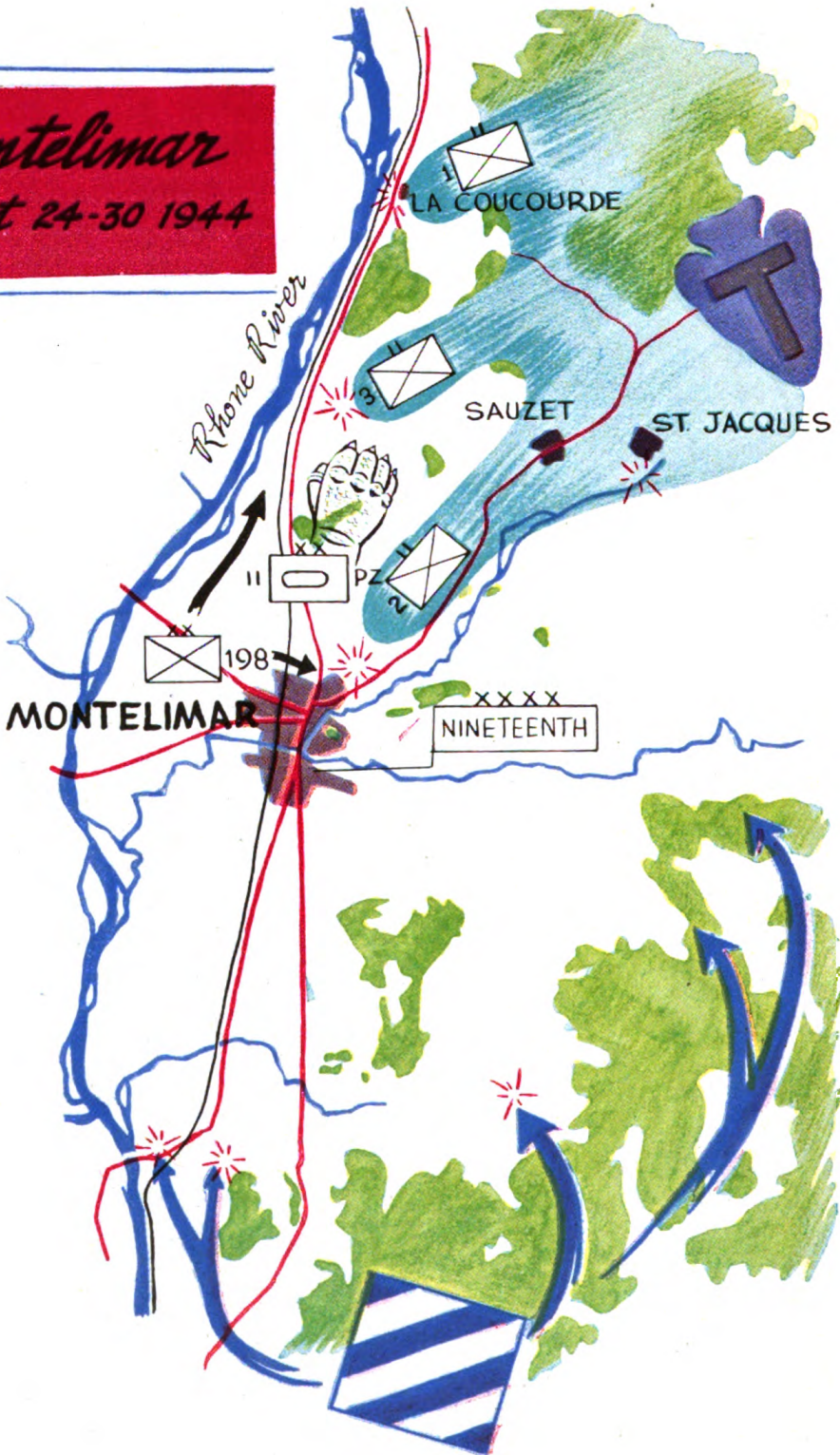
For three days our columns rumbled north, giving birth to impressions that will always remain with us—mountains and fertile green valleys; little villages with huge cathedrals; steel helmets filled with eggs; cakes of rich butter rolled in

clean wet leaves; rich red wine from the Rhone; a peasant woman with her apron filled with not quite ripened apples; a little girl with a French flag throwing a clumsily made corsage tied together with a bit of red, white and blue ribbon that stings your face as you roll on northward; the bells in every little village announcing the liberation as the first doughboy-laden tank grinds through the cheering crowds; a group of mountaineers with FFI brassards on their arms and nondescript firearms resting easily in the crooks of their arms, standing beside a bridge that is standing untouched waiting for American tanks to rumble across it and onward towards Germany ... Vive La France! ... Vive L'Amérique! This was the way to fight a war!





Montelimar  
August 24-30 1944



*"Then all hell broke loose."*

*John Milton*

## VIII

### *Montélimar and the Pursuit North*

Then came Montélimar! A name that was to take its place along with Salerno, the Rapido, San Pietro and Cassino, a place where battle reached its highest crescendo and waving flags, cheering crowds and corsages tied together with bits of red, white and blue ribbon are forgotten.

The VI Corps had been advancing from the beach in two columns. The right column, spearheaded by "Task Force Butler", was 140 miles inland on D plus eight. The left column, mainly composed of the 3rd Division, was coming up the Rhone Valley on the heels of the retreating Nineteenth German Army. On the 23rd of August we turned to the west at Aspres and moved 70 kilometers to detruck on the high ground above Marsanne, a village on the very edge of the great Rhone Valley bottom and ten kilometers from Montélimar which sits squarely astride the main north-south highway in the Rhone River Valley. The Nineteenth German Army had not yet passed Montélimar in its retreat to the north. An excerpt from the official records of the regiment best describes the significance of the town: "The Division Artillery Commander advised that all bridges west of Montélimar had been knocked out. Since the Air Corps and the FFI had already effectively blocked or destroyed the bridges across the Rhone River, the only escape route of the Germans lay to the north through the regimental positions." To the south of us lay the bulk of the Nineteenth German Army with the 3rd Division pushing at its heels. On the high ground just east of Montélimar was the 141st Infantry. On the map of an Army or Division Commander the German Nineteenth Army was in a desperate plight. It was one of those situations when the blood of a few men can contribute a great deal toward defeating the enemy. That, from the viewpoint of the "Big Picture", is the most economical way to fight and win a war. Months later we were to read of the T Patch Division having "smashed the Nineteenth German Army at Montélimar". We didn't know the big picture then and wouldn't have had time to think about it if we had. No one could have convinced us that



we were "smashing" anything. For us Montélimar and the week from August 24th to the 30th was one of the fullest 168 hour weeks of the war.

For us in the 2nd Battalion, Montélimar means a barren hill with German tanks and infantry surrounding us for six unforgettable hours; thousands of rounds of our own artillery thudding into the waves of Germans that were flung at our position from every side; Mark V tanks so close that you could feel the heat from the motor; a withdrawal at night from a hill covered with burning, exploding

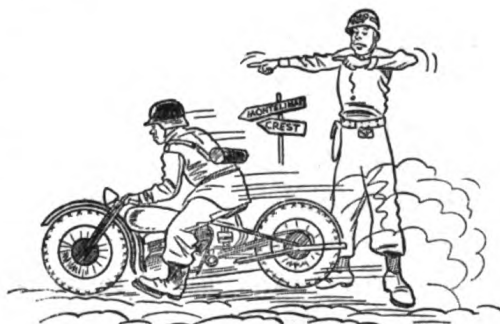


tanks, knocked out guns and dead men. We will never forget the eery sight of a TD pulling a knocked out ton-and-a-half and a 57 mm. AT gun loaded down with 50 men swathed in blood soaked bandages and a handful of Medicos with their white and red helmets gleaming in the moonlight. We were all too dazed to think much; just surprised and thankful that we were still alive and free; thanking God for having the kind of Medicos we had; thanking God for the 131st Field Artillery which was throwing hundreds of rounds of shells over our heads keeping the Krauts pinned down. For 24 hours we had held that hill looking down on Montélimar against a rising flood of German troops pushing north as the 3rd Division

was reported only ten miles to the south. We knew that we had taken a beating, but for every man we had lost on that hill, we knew the Krauts had paid ten times as he assaulted across that open ground.

But the road to Deutschland was not open to the Germans yet. At La Courcourde, just north of Montélimar, the 1st Battalion had fought its way over Hill 300 and blocked the road with eight tank destroyers and three tanks. Desperately the enemy flung the full weight of his force against us. In the darkness we could hear the clank of slowly moving armor on the highway to the south. At one o'clock in the morning hell broke loose and only when six of our tank destroyers and all three of our tanks were in flames around us did we fall back before the frenzied onslaught of the skilled 11th Panzer Division, which was seeking to escape from the rapidly decreasing pocket in which it was caught.

In the fighting around Montélimar operations were often in a confused state. Near Crest a fleeing Jerry motorcyclist approached a crossroads near the Division Command Post. Standing there was one of the faithful Division MP's attempting to keep straight the mobile affairs of the 36th. Seeing the Jerry speeding toward him in frantic flight, the MP, following the dictates of his habits, helpfully waved him on.



Gradually as more of the Division was brought into the battle our scene shifted a little to the south and the 3rd Battalion spent a bloody and costly day attacking a cluster of heavily defended stone buildings perched on top of a small hill in the rolling Rhone Valley like some medieval fortress.

That was Montélimar! . . . a great savage beast trapped and mortally wounded fought with a determination and fierceness that was new to those of us who had fought the elite of the German Army at Salerno, Mignano Gap, Cassino and Anzio. To the men that command our armies it was a daring blow, a gamble that turned an organized and formidable German Army into a broken, disorganized and terribly weakened mass of men and materiel fleeing to the north. To our officers it was a period of trying to do too much with too little, trying to see the broader aspect and believe that the heavy casualties suffered would save many lives later when this same German force could fight us under more advantageous conditions. To the dogface carrying a BAR or an M-1 it was a week when a man couldn't even afford the luxury of thinking about mail, which is the most important thing in a combat soldier's life, and only at rare moments did he dare let his thoughts go to that quiet life with the little wife and kids. It was the kind of a fight that makes

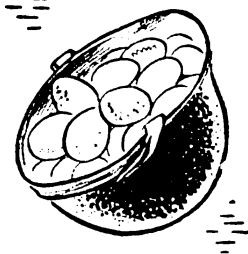
the litter bearer and the aid man the doughboy's hero. It was the kind of a fight that leaves the men that are left in a company united by a close bond that you can never tell anyone about—the thing that keeps an outfit going day after day, week after week and month after month, attacking almost every day the way we were going to for the next three months.

We made our last attack at Montélimar as the situation broke on the 30th, and by midnight the same day we were rolling north in two columns; the 1st and 3rd Battalions through Crest toward Bourg De Peage, and the 2nd Battalion swinging right up into the foothills of the Dauphine Alps, stronghold of the FFI, and crossing the Doubs River on a bridge seized by the FFI to encircle Romans from the north.

Chabeuil and Valence fell to the 3rd Battalion as the whole regiment assembled at Romans and prepared to push on north to France's third largest city, Lyon. Two days later we stood at the outskirts of Lyon, but due to a political situation within the city we never entered. The FFI and the Vichy Police, the Melice, were carrying on a lively battle in parts of the city.

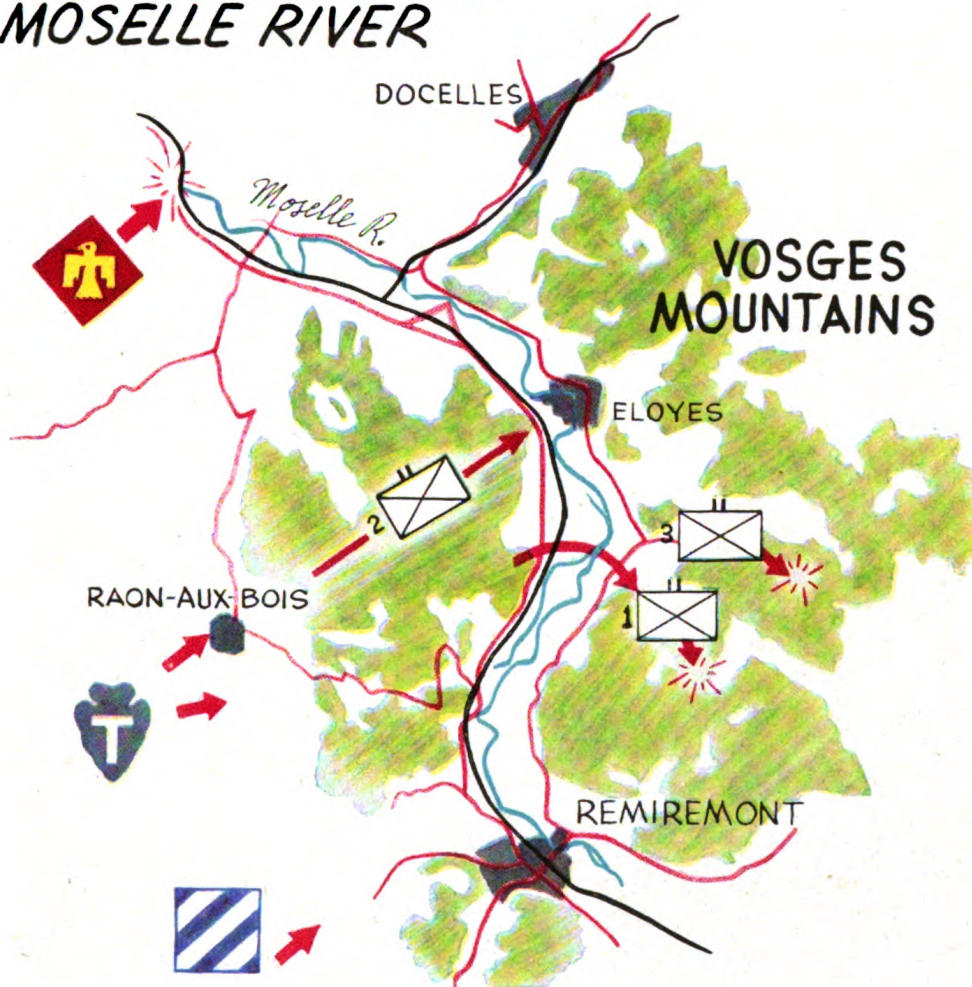
From the 3rd of September until we reached the Moselle River line on the 21st of September, the war moved rapidly and we met Jerry in one sharp clash after another. Only once did the enemy stop his retreat long enough to fight. After passing the 3rd Division at Besançon, we stopped at Vesoul while the 1st and 3rd Battalions joined forces with the 3rd Battalion of the 15th Infantry to attack a strong German force that stood and slugged it out for six hours before it turned and fled leaving burning trucks, 88's and dead behind. But mostly the towns and rivers and villages we took are very vague in our minds—Flacy, Mailleroncourt, Faverney, Fougerolles, Luxeuil Les Bains, Corbenay are just passing names. Mostly we remember the good things about those days from Montelimar to the Moselle. If Jerry had any artillery we were moving too fast for him to use it. The French people were fine, genuine people who welcomed us into their homes whenever we had a moment to stop. If there weren't as many flags and flowers as there had been in Southern France, there was just as wholesome a kind of people that reminded us of the folks back home in Texas and Ohio. One thing about the people of France is that the welcome is in direct proportion to the amount of artillery you have to use to drive the Germans out of their towns. Later, in the Vosges, where a lot of us fought our hearts out to take a town, we found a cold and icy attitude among the people.

We crossed the Moselle River the same day we reached it, taking from the Germans the first terrain feature in France that they had hoped to hold indefinitely. With the regiment assembling in Raon Aux Bois, our Regimental Commander





# 141<sup>ST</sup> INF. FIRST ACROSS the MOSELLE RIVER





went forward with a patrol and from the forested heights on the river bank looked down on the unsuspecting Germans at Eloyes busily engaged in constructing trenches and hasty fortifications on the far side of the river. His recommendations that an immediate, hastily planned crossing against uncompleted German defenses would be better than a delayed and better planned operation against completed defenses were accepted and before midnight on the 20th of September the regiment was moving forward from Raon Aux Bois.

The 1st Battalion was selected to make the crossing, closely followed by the 3rd Battalion. A decision was made to cross midway between Eloyes and St. Nabord where little activity had been observed and where civilians had reported the location of a fording site.

Meanwhile the 2nd Battalion was ordered to make an earlier, diversionary attack on Eloyes in order to pull as many of the enemy forces as possible away from the actual crossing. After being led through the dense forest by the 70 year old mayor of Raon Aux Bois during the night of the 21st, the 2nd Battalion reached the high ground just above Eloyes by 0500 hours the following morning. During the first moments of daylight a dense fog hung over the Moselle and E and G Companies entered the town without a shot being fired. Just as the last platoon of E Company reached the first houses at the edge of town the fog lifted abruptly and German machine guns from both flanks began to spray the town.

Shortly after the Germans in Eloyes had been alerted, the actual crossing began. The 1st Battalion, having reached the river a few kilometers south of the town, waded through the icy water, four to five feet deep, and gained the far side of the river before the crossing was discovered. By noon the bridgehead was firmly established. Less fortunate had been the crossings a little farther to the right by the 3rd Battalion. In the lifting fog, I Company, with the battalion command group, crossed the river apparently unopposed and were advancing toward the tree line when the Germans opened up from a dozen machine gun positions within 300 yards of the company and the entire first platoon was killed, captured or wounded. Caught in the murderous cross fire, the second platoon tried to withdraw to the river bank to gain cover but many of the men were wounded before this could be accomplished. The 3rd Battalion Commander was wounded and captured with the first platoon. The Operations Officer, a Captain, was killed. The crossing at this point was abandoned and the battalion moved to the left and crossed behind the 1st Battalion.

We were the first Seventh Army Troops across the Moselle. The 143rd Infantry followed us across at the St. Nabord site and the 142nd Infantry entered Remiremont from the south only after our 1st Battalion made the defense of the town impossible for the Germans by cutting south from our bridgehead to take

the high ground north of the town. At this time the 3rd Infantry Division was still engaged to our right rear and the 45th Division was launching an attack across the Moselle at Epinal against heavy opposition.

Our operations in Southern France were completed. Ahead of us, behind misty grey curtains of rain and fog, rose the formidable Vosges Mountains, which no army had ever before managed to penetrate in force.

*"For the rain it raineth every day."*

*Shakespeare*

IX

*Forging the Vosges*

If breaching the German Moselle River line seemed difficult, it soon became dwarfed in our minds by the imposing barrier of the forested Vosges Mountains that lay ahead. Distance measured in miles in our drive up through Southern France was now to be measured in yards. St. Jean du Marche, Lepanges, Herpeltmont, Lavaline du Houx, and other French villages at the Vosges foothills soon became familiar landmarks; not merely spots on a map that were sped by on the top of tanks and in trucks and jeeps, but places that were approached on foot, liberated only after overcoming stubborn resistance, and then frequently revisited as we were continually shifted from one section of the front to another, like a tailback trying to pick up yardage by sweeping the ends only to be stopped dead in his tracks by the weight of the opposing team.

For some of us it was a new experience battling it out with the enemy and the terrain yard by yard, but for others it recalled bitter memories of the Italian campaign. The mountains, the mud, and the mine fields were in front of us once again, but, unlike Italy, there was no Rome glittering on the horizon. After one mountain was gained there was nothing ahead but another, always another mountain, higher and more heavily defended than the last. Seldom did our thoughts reach out beyond these confining barriers. Only occasionally did we talk of the Alsace Plain and the Rhine beyond. Even less did the armchair strategists among us discuss the war in broad outlines. Our horizon was a limited one, extending only to the particular valley or forested hill immediately in front of us. More often it stretched only a few hundred yards ahead through a maze of pine trees or to a farmhouse at the edge of a woodline. Ours was an outlook as provincial as the isolated peasants around us, but we were too occupied to be concerned with more than our immediate surroundings. A small strip of land became our sole interest, our life.

We weren't in the Vosges Mountains long before we realized that the Ger-

mans were not our only enemy. Jerry had made an ally of the forested hills and rugged terrain. The high mountain peaks gave him OP's; the dense forest growth, concealment. Practically every natural advantage was his. It was a terrain friendly to the defender, hostile to the attacker. What defenses nature failed to furnish, Jerry provided for himself. With characteristic efficiency he constructed well dug-in positions. Every rifleman and machine gunner had deep, heavily covered foxholes that looked down on the only lanes of approach open to us. Jerry had always been a master of camouflage, and his dug in positions in the Vosges forests, which made use of every available leaf and pine needle, showed that he had lost none of his technique. Many of us never saw his positions until we were right on top of them, and then it was usually too late. Mine fields, which had been such a curse to us in Italy, became a part of the Vosges landscape as the dreaded, foot-shearing Schu mines were sprinkled over the ground before us. Planted under the forest floor, their trip wires camouflaged by the maze of twigs and underbrush, they were an unseen, but ever present, enemy. Every step was a probed one as a misstep meant a foot, a leg, or sometimes even a life. Then there was the artillery.



If ever the Germans and the forest seemed allied, it was never more noticeable than when enemy artillery shells burst in the tree-tops, spraying metal down on us like rain falling from an evil sky. Forever on the attack, we rarely had time enough to dig deep foxholes and almost never the chance to cover them. A mere hole in the ground was no protection against shell fragments falling from above—we could only stay there and sweat it out. Even a little artillery was able to do a lot of damage in these woods. The destructiveness of one tree burst alone was equal to several shells exploding in open ground. But for the first time in France the Germans had the artillery. "They fired all the time. They fired more than we did, and it's the only time I ever saw that happen," remarked an Engineer officer who had been forced to commit his company on the line as infantry and was undergoing his first experience with tree bursts. They had the SP's, too, and these high velocity 88's, bursting in the treetops, added to the hail of shell fragments descending upon us. If at night the artillery let up somewhat, it did not cease. The night only served to illuminate the reddish glare of the shell bursts and to magnify their explosive crash against the trees, causing them to appear closer to us than they actually were. The darkness of the evenings filled the forest with a dreaded stillness which was





Forging The Vosges

— FROM THE MOSELLE TO THE MEURTHE





irregularly broken by weird and nerve-wracking noises. The pine trees, swaying in the wind, whistled eerily, much as artillery shells skimming overhead. Branches fell from the aging trees and knocked against tree trunks and limbs on their way to the ground, much as spent shell fragments would batter against the trees around us. Twigs would snap and leaves would rustle on the ground, suggesting the tread of approaching feet, but more often than not it would be merely the wind playing with the forest growth. The night seemed to delight in playing tricks on us. Sometimes the trees, silhouetted against the skyline, would dress up like humans with long bayonet-like limbs ready to strike down on us. Every twig seemed to conceal a Schu mine, every bush a sniper. Night time seemed an infinity. If the Germans were an enemy, the woods and the hills were a more dangerous enemy. Jerry was something real, but the dense forests, especially at night, contained things intangible and unseen that played heavily upon our imagination and allowed us little rest.

As the last pieces of artillery were moved across the Moselle river, we were working our way south along the Vosges foothills and probing the dense, fog shrouded woods of the Forêt De Fossard. On the 25th of September the 1st Battalion succeeded in blocking the Remiremont-St. Ame road. The 3rd Battalion, proceeding farther south, cleared the north section of Remiremont. A patrol was then sent back across the river to make contact with the 142nd Infantry Regiment, which was still mopping up the main part of the town situated on the west bank. The following day the 1st and 2nd Battalions, advancing east through the heavily mined Forêt De Fossard against extremely stubborn resistance, cleared St. Ame and Putieres. Heavy rains and fog made the registering of supporting artillery fire extremely difficult in this area.

As September drew to a close we mounted trucks and rode to Chenimenil, passing through Eloyes and Jarmenil. The 1st and 2nd Battalions marched out of Chenimenil on foot and through Tendon, preparatory to a night attack on Houx, while the 3rd Battalion moved to the high ground southeast of Tendon, attached to the 142nd Infantry. As the 1st Battalion approached the outskirts of Houx, it was subjected to extremely heavy self-propelled and artillery fire. Heavy casualties were sustained and the battalion badly disorganized. The 2nd Battalion, which had been in support of the attack, escaped with few casualties.

Orders were then received for our regiment to relieve elements of the 143rd Infantry east of the Jarmenil-Bruyeres road, and the 1st and 2nd Battalions were sent back to Docelles and northeast along the Bruyeres road to attack the Houx Valley from the rear. St. Jean du Marche was entered by Company F on the 29th of September against no opposition, but as the 2nd Battalion began to move north from the town it encountered resistance on the northern outskirts. The 1st Battal-

ion, pushing northeast of St. Jean du Marche, ran into strong resistance and was fired upon by enemy self-propelled guns and artillery. With supporting armor, the battalion gradually fought its way northeast to Lepanges.

According to the operational maps, progress was unbearably slow during our first few weeks in the Vosges. Yet our tired, blistering feet and aching backs told us another story. For every precious mile that we advanced, countless miles were hiked on foot up and down the circuitous mountain trails. They were wearisome marches with heavy equipment through the dense forests and crag-covered mountains. Even when the enemy was not immediately to our front, there were always the Schu mines and the tree bursts. Casualties mounted. Platoon Sergeants and Squad Leaders appeared to be marked men and Privates rose to Sergeants almost overnight as they filled their places. The group of replacements that had come to us at Remiremont disappeared rapidly and our resources became low. We were weary and tired. Morale was ebbing. One topic hung on our lips: "When are we going to get a rest?" was the question in everyone's mind. Latrine rumor visited every foxhole and helped to sustain our morale with its optimistic reports on our long awaited relief. We carried mental calendars around with us and marked off our consecutive days of combat since the Riviera landings: 65, 66, 67 ... it wouldn't be long now. Still we fought on. Rumors persisted, but the relief never came.

Around Tendon, where the 3rd Battalion was attached to the 142nd Infantry, the enemy had laid down an almost impassable barrier of mine fields and well entrenched positions. Days of grueling fighting raged in this area as our casualties mounted from the dreaded tree bursts, mines and automatic small arms fire of a stubborn enemy that refused to budge. On the high forested ground northeast of St. Jean du Marche, the 1st and 2nd Battalions were equally occupied. The mines were the thickest and artillery the heaviest that had yet been encountered by us in France. Slowly the 1st and 2nd Battalions probed their way along the high ground towards Herpeltmont, the 1st Battalion initially to the left of the 2nd. Stiff opposition was encountered by both units as the 1st Battalion was brought across the Houx-Herpeltmont road in back of the 2nd Battalion and sent to the hill mass south of Herpeltmont. Every inch of the way was difficult and heavy casualties were sustained as the men were seemingly getting nowhere. Yet gradually we advanced. On October 5th the 3rd Battalion was released from the 142nd Infantry. With three battalions in the attack, Herpeltmont fell on the 8th, and we were half way to the Meurthe River. There seemed to be a plan to it after all. The long, arduous maneuvering marches up and down the circuitous mountain trails finally appeared to have had a purpose.

Then on October 23rd we went into the Forêt Domaniale De Champ. The 1st

Battalion went forward to take the high ridge and ground overlooking La Houssiere. Late that afternoon a strong enemy force worked its way in between the rifle companies and the battalion command post. That night a coded message from one of the rifle companies was radioed into Regimental Headquarters: "No rations, no water, no communications with Headquarters (battalion) . . . four litter cases." Up on top of the thickly wooded hill above La Houssiere 275 men were spread out in an area 300 to 350 yards, preparing positions. No one was making any noise. "We were quiet," a Red Battalion Squad Leader recounted afterwards, "because the Germans were all around us. We were quiet because we were a 'Lost Battalion', and we didn't want Jerry to know it."

Soon all hell broke loose. Two full companies of Germans coming from all directions advanced on the 1st Battalion, the initial assault being followed by an immediate build-up. "Somehow we managed to beat them off," recalled a replacement who had characteristically come into combat when the going was roughest. "You know what I kept thinking?" continued the rookie, "I kept thinking how wonderful it would be back on my farm in Kentucky, and that here was something that I could tell my two youngsters about when they grow up. Y'know something funny . . . I wasn't scared . . . honest I wasn't."

"But a lot of us were scared," remarked a medico who had come overseas with the outfit. "We old fellows knew what the score was. There's not much you can do when you're cut off like that, with only so much ammunition, with no water, no food. About all you can do is sweat it out."

Nevertheless, those of us who were isolated found lots of things to keep us occupied. "We pooled our rations," recounted an Able Company rifleman. "We collected everything from Coleman stoves to chewing gum. But our supplies didn't last long. Water soon became even more scarce than food. Fortunately we discovered a small pond near our area, but we couldn't get to it whenever we wanted to. You see, Jerry was using the same water hole." For some of us on the surrounded hill the days dragged and the nights never seemed to end. We dug our holes a little deeper and tried to improve our circular defense. Patrols were sent out to fight their way back to the rear; several never returned, none got through. Only one solitary workable radio remained in our possession. It was coddled and babied like a child, for it was our only unruptured communication artery. Coded messages were continually sent emphasizing the desperateness of our situation. Word was radioed back that help was on its way. We wondered when—or if—it would arrive.

Meanwhile those of us who had not met with the 1st Battalion's fate went out into the forested hills in an attempt to break through. We were joined by men from two battalions of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, Americans of Japan-

ese descent—brave, determined little men with slanting eyes who seemed almost anxious for a fight. “Man, they could fight!” exclaimed a George Company wireman as his company was moving through the forest along their flank. “They didn’t appear scared of anything; they just kept advancing through the forest standing up and firing from the hip at anything that moved. They sure knew how to make our Tommy Gun talk!”

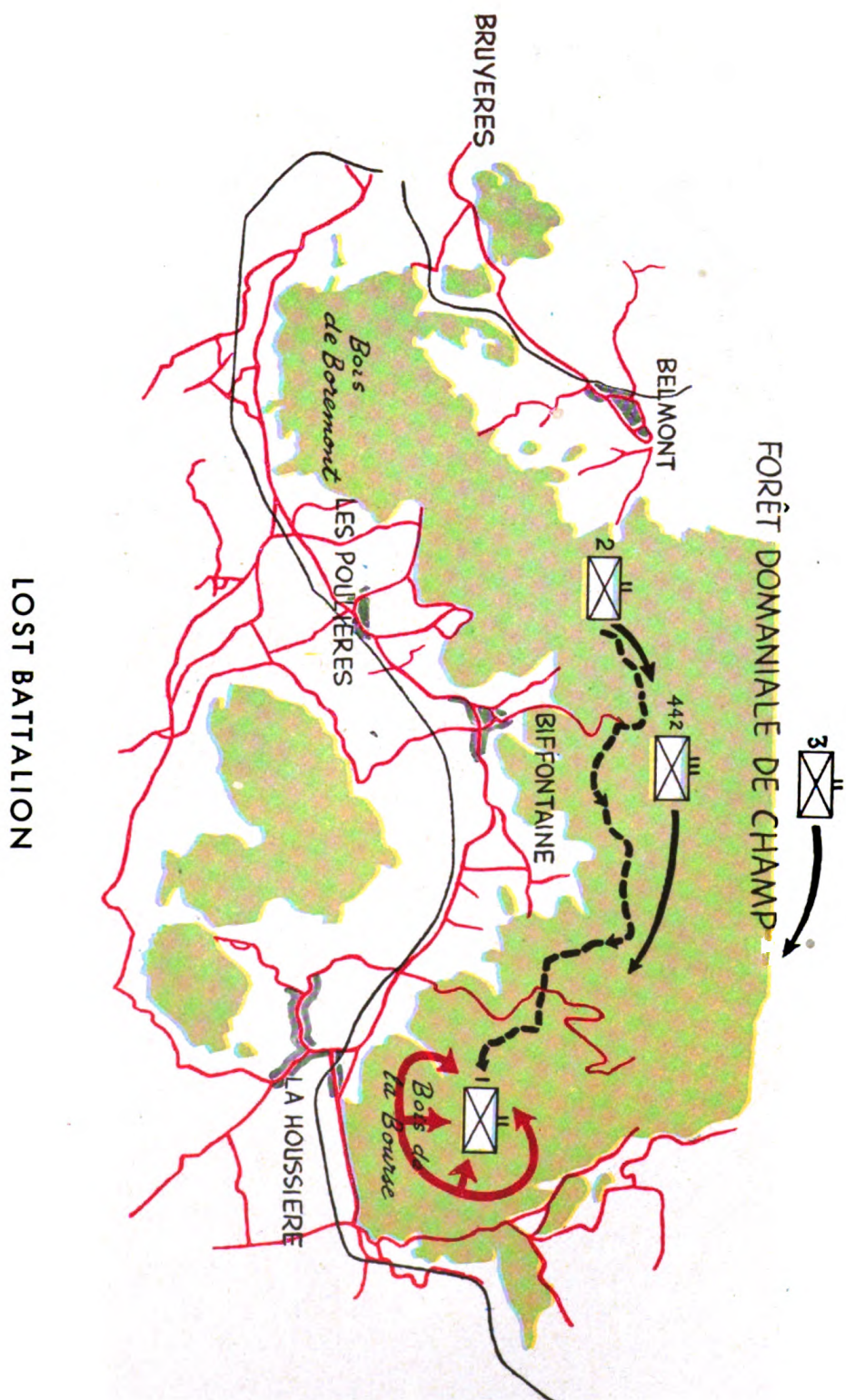
Determination and guts, however, were not enough. The Germans had a large force in well dug-in positions waiting for us. They had self-propelled guns firing into the trees from every direction and dense concentrations of mortar and artillery fire. If the shells didn’t land in a particular patch of ground, that area was certain to be covered with impassable mine fields. Our first attempt to break through failed.

Those of us up on the hill overlooking La Houssiere tightened our belts and tried to carry on. We talked of countless things. “But food was our chief topic,” said a Dog Company machine gunner. “We concocted in our minds fabulous dishes of T-Bone steaks, fried eggs and nice crisp bacon. Our wives’ and mothers’ favorite recipes were argued over. Once we spent a whole morning just talking about milk shakes . . . thick and malty ones with double portions of ice cream.” For five days those of us in the 1st Battalion starved. We tried to find food in the forest and to trap birds, but had very little luck. The shelling increased. Casualties mounted. Simple services were held for the dead and their graves jotted down for the GRO.\*

Few of us talked about the casualties. We kept our thoughts to ourselves, wondering who would be next.

Over the radio coded messages continued to be sent, requests for medical supplies, rations, water and ammunition. Finally the artillery attempted to shoot supply filled shells to us. Their first efforts failed miserably. Then planes of the XII TAC were called upon. “To signal the planes we collected everything white we could find,” explained a 1st Battalion wireman. “Linings from parkas and maps and even underwear were all stretched out in a long white strip. We bent the trunks of young trees and tied smoke grenades to them. Then when the planes came over we released the tree trunks and pulled the grenade pins, hoping that the smoke could be seen from above.” The first air drops missed and the Germans enjoyed supplies intended for those of us on the hill. “We were just praying,” remarked a Charlie Company Squad Leader. Finally on the afternoon of the fifth day the pilots and the artillerymen began to find their targets, and food, ammunition, medical supplies and radio batteries descended on us. The radio acknowledged their arrival. “Everything hitting on target . . . tell the Artillery and Air Corps boys we love ’em!”

\* Grave Registration Officer.





Now we could eat, but we couldn't relax. We were still a lost battalion. On the morning of the sixth day the Germans launched their strongest attack. The planes had revealed to them the desperateness of our situation. Employing a devastating artillery barrage, they lunged at us in great force. Somehow, after savage fire fights, we managed to hold our ground and drive them off.

In the meantime the men of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, together with those of us in the 2nd and 3rd Battalions, had still been trying to break through to our besieged comrades. On the afternoon of the sixth day (October 30th) a 1st Battalion rifleman on outpost saw a figure approaching through the trees. Fearing it might be a Jerry, the rifleman remained in place and strained his eyes to obtain a better view. Then like a crazed person he ran down the hill laughing, crying and yelling at the approaching figure. Pfc. Mutt Sakumoto was at a loss for words as the rifleman ran towards him and hugged him and shouted words of thankfulness. About all he could think of to say was: "Could you use a cigarette?"

We were mighty thankful to the brave little men of the 442nd Infantry. Many of us owed our lives to them. Later on in the war we heard that some of these same men had been refused entrance into American Legion clubs in Oregon. Several of us wrote indignant letters; all of us boiled inside at an act so contrary to the ideals we and our Nisei comrades had been fighting for.

The relief of the besieged 1st Battalion didn't mean a respite for us. Parts of the Forêt Domaniale De Champ remained to be cleared, and we pushed slowly on against a stubbornly resisting enemy. Days and nights of battling with Jerry followed. The densely forested mountains around La Houssiere were bitterly defended. Those of us in the 1st Battalion remember the two days of rest in Deycimont where we enjoyed hot meals, showers and clean clothes. Forty-eight hours of having the war made. Then those of us who had just been released from isolation were made a part of the Stack Force and participated in seemingly endless skirmishes around Le Tholy where Jerry wracked the trees in front of us with "rat" pistols and machine guns whenever we appeared in sight.

Finally, after days of strongly contested advances, days and nights made worse by the drenching rains, mud and approaching snows, the enemy began to withdraw. For a while contact was lost. Nerve-wracking patrol work was intensified to locate the opposing forces. "Probing around for Jerry wasn't any fun," recounted a scout from Love Company, even if the Brass did have him G-2ed to be miles away. Those Krauts had more mines planted in those woods than you could shake a stick at." No, it wasn't any fun; there was always the anticipation of trouble ahead. Few of us will forget the sight of Anould, Champdray, Rehau-pal, Gérardmer and other French towns burning in the distance as the retreating





*"... I can't see any reason for it!  
I just had a shower only a month ago!"*

Germans ruthlessly applied the scorched earth policy. At night flames from the burning houses illuminated the sky. Each evening the hazy red inflamed skyline seemed to change direction, indicating that a new village had fallen prey to this Teutonic vandalism. We realized a little more strongly than before the kind of enemy we were facing—one who would stop at nothing. We felt sorry for the villagers. Often times when we had asked these peasants for potatoes, eggs, wine and other delicacies, the answer had invariably been, "Je n'ai pas rien ... Les Boches prenaient tous." Before we had been skeptical—now we began to believe them. We began feeling sorry for ourselves, too, as the towns in front of us went up in flames. The first snows were beginning to fall and we were cold and shivering—weren't we ever going to see the inside of a house again?

The enemy's barbarous scorched earth policy nurtured latrine rumor to her greatest heights. Navy scuttlebutt could never compare with her magnificent rationalizations that we were coming to a winter line that could never be broken. Hadn't the opposing forces in the last war perched themselves up on these same Vosges Mountain heights and waved at one another while a veritable truce was in effect? Dame rumor erroneously led us to believe that we would have the war made.

Actually, nothing could have been further from the truth. We were approaching the Meurthe River and were soon to again encounter bitter resistance.

Fortunately, as in all wars, there were occasional breaks from the hellishness of the battlefield. We will never forget the precious days in the Vosges when our outfits were pulled back out of range of the dreaded artillery fire for a day or so of rest. For some of us it brings back memories of Lepanges, or St. Jean du Marche, for others Deycimont or possibly Docelles. For all of us it recalls shower tents where our bare feet froze as they touched the icy floor boards and the rest of our body tried vainly to keep our circulation going as the questionably hot water trickled down from above. We also recall the feeling of exhilaration as we stepped out of those ice tents, freed of Italian and French mud, or, for some of us rookies,

Omaha beach accumulations. Then there were clean clothes, never our size, but nonetheless clean. Sometimes these short reliefs would mean a chance to see a movie. More often than not the sound track would fail and the film would never run to the end without breaking down three or four times, but still we appreciated them; it was at least a momentary taste of civilized life. Occasionally Red Cross girls would come around and hand out doughnuts. We always welcomed their presence. They were real live American girls and made our wives and sweethearts seem just a little bit nearer. Unfortunately these periods of rest were always short-lived—forty-eight hours if we were lucky. More than once an anticipated two day rest was reduced to a few hours by an alert to “get ’em on and get ready to move out.”



For some of us there are happy memories of rest camps. Two days of paradise at Bruyeres or Luxueil-Les-Bains. Some of us recall Bains-Les-Bains and the wonderful hospitality of Candy and Kay. On November 20th, Paris opened up as the big deal. But these respites were enjoyed by only a few. The majority of us sweated out our turn to go for weeks and even months.

As we came up to the Meurthe River we were approaching an enemy firmly entrenched on its eastern banks in a complex network of trenches, barbed wire entanglements and innumerable mine fields. Here was the enemy's proposed winter line. In these positions the Germans hoped to remain, content to let us occupy the burnt out remains of Anould, Gerbepal and other pillaged hamlets. But we had other intentions. We didn't care for charcoaled remains. Houses were com-



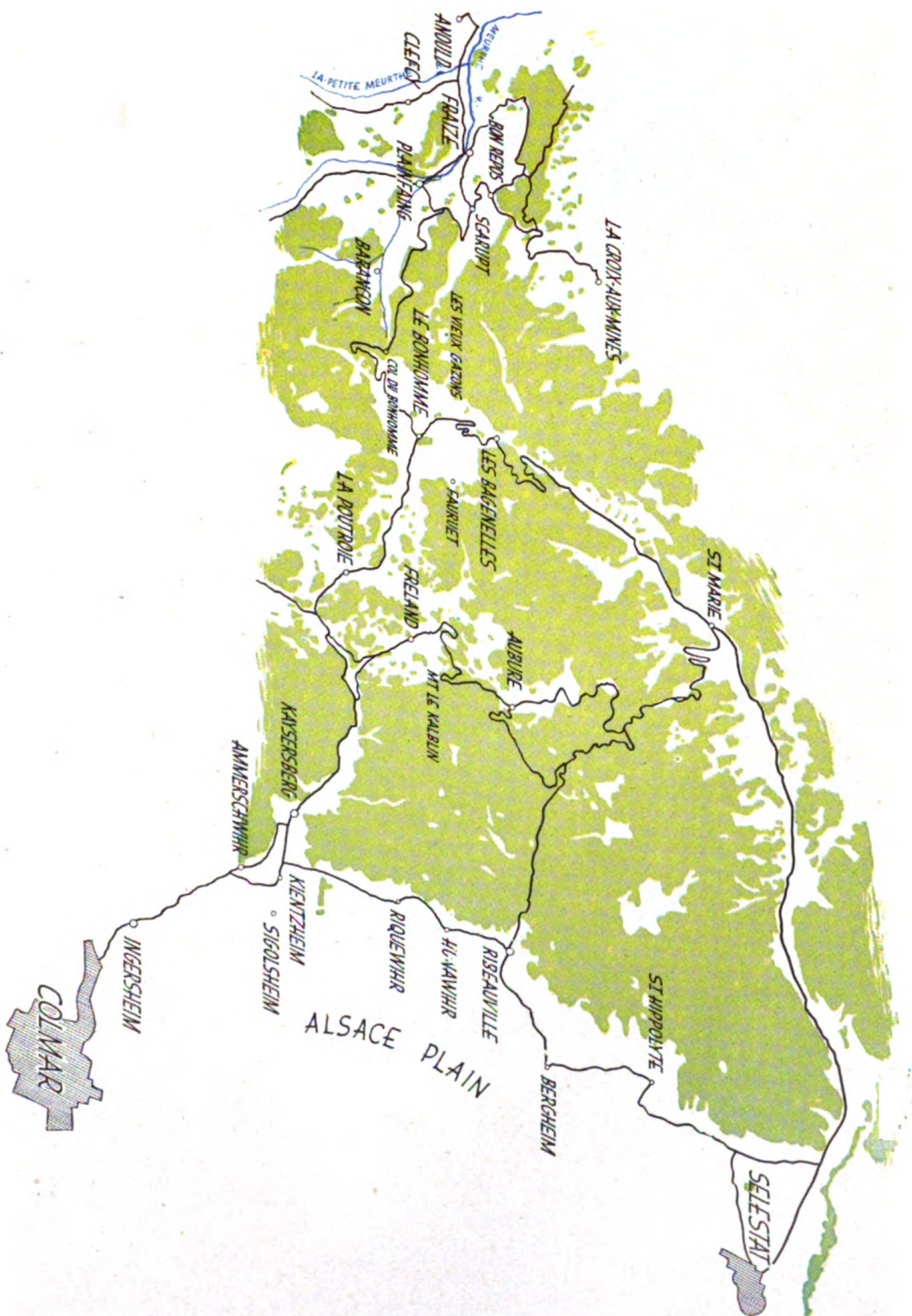
*"... Are you really a PFC or are you just impersonating a non-com?"*

forting places in this cold, mountainous country, even if they couldn't be visited much of the time.

Early in the morning of the 21st of November, A and B Companies crossed in the vicinity of Clefcy. It was rough going across this treacherous stream. Although little more than a good broadjump across, the stream was deep and the current swift. Two men were drowned. "That's one stream I'll never forget," recalled a Baker Company rifleman, "you could almost reach across it, but once you set your foot in it you were taking your life in your hands." Clefcy was entered and found unoccupied. Then the 3rd Battalion, with K and L Companies, crossed the tricky stream somewhat south of Clefcy, dug in and then advanced east. Meanwhile the 1st Battalion moved towards the high ground northeast of the town. The terraced, open approaches to the high ground were covered with barbed wire entanglements. On reaching the top of the ridge the 1st Battalion ran right into German positions concealed on the wooded summit. Immediately machine guns, automatic weapons and rifle grenades opened up. Some of the men jumped into vacant enemy trenches, but the majority were unable to find cover. Under the hail of enemy fire the battalion was forced to withdraw.

This network of barbed wire entanglements, mines and trenches along the Meurthe River was proving a formidable barrier. Fortunately the enemy was unable to man its defenses at every point. Leaving the Clefcy sector to a reconnaissance outfit, we suddenly shifted our forces to the north as the 1st and 2nd Battalions crossed the river next to Anould and moved eastward along the high wooded ground north of Fraize. The two battalions advanced steadily through the heavily mined woods, meeting little opposition. Thanksgiving turkey was enjoyed by C and F Companies in Fraize. It came a day late, but nonetheless it was cause for rejoicing; we had broken through the Meurthe River line defenses, and the cost had not been nearly as great as had been feared.

The enemy before us was retreating, but his retreat was in no sense a rout. Instead it was a planned, systematic withdrawal. Every natural advantage of terrain was being cleverly utilized to make our advance as costly as possible. Our course of action, in turn, involved extensive patrolling to seek out the enemy strong points, the establishment of road blocks to trap the enemy forces, and the mopping up of the cornered troops. Following this plan the 1st and 2nd Battalions pushed on beyond Fraize and established road blocks on the Fraize-Plainfaing and Fraize-Scarupt roads, blocking the Fraize Valley. Pressing on in pursuit of the enemy, the battalions headed for the important road network at Col du Bonhomme; the 2nd Battalion patrolling along the high ground in the vicinity of Scarupt and Barançon and the 1st Battalion, moving north of the 2nd Battalion, passing through Bon Repos and on to Les Vieux Gazons. C Company, in the lead,



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pressed on to cut the road running from Col du Bonhomme to Les Baganelles. At the same time A and B Companies received heavy machine gun, rifle and mortar fire from Hill 1128 in the vicinity of Les Vieux Gazons. Two TD's and one tank were lost in this action by enemy anti-tank rockets. Gradually the situation cleared up as the 3rd Battalion relieved the 1st Battalion and the latter moved to La Croix Aux Mines for a short rest. The month ended with us holding and attacking along an eighteen and one-half mile front. The 2nd and 3rd Battalions were probing through the dense forests on the high ground west and northwest of Le Bonhomme and blocking the road network at Col du Bonhomme. Contact was maintained with the French on our right flank, who were in the vicinity of Gérardmer.

On the 3rd of December we began the final drive through the Vosges Mountains to the Alsace Plain. Shifting all of its forces east, the 1st Battalion attacked from the high ground southeast of St. Marie, intending to move along the forested snow covered high ground paralleling the Aubure-Freland road. The high mountain terrain, however, made it impossible to bring up supplies and the 1st Battalion was forced to go into reserve. The 2nd Battalion then moved by motor to a position two miles north of Aubure and attacked south, seizing Hill 924 (Mt. Le Kalblin). The 3rd Battalion, coordinating its attack with the 2nd Battalion, moved southeast from the high ground north of Faurupt along the high ground paralleling the Le Bonhomme-La Poutroie road. In our advance along the snow covered roads, through dense forests of white coated pine trees, we climbed the highest peaks of the Vosges. From the summits of these mountains our view was almost limitless. Germany, our far off goal, could be seen in the form of the high peaks of the Forêt Noir silhouetted in the distant skyline. It was a great feeling of achievement to realize that the highest ground in the Vosges Mountains had finally been scaled and that for once there was no series of higher Vosges mountains ahead.

The coordinated attack met only moderate opposition, but heavy mine fields concealed beneath the snow covered ground made the going difficult. On the 5th of December, Company F had cleared Freland and had made contact with the 3rd Battalion in the town. Memories of Italy were recaptured as 1500 Goums of the French First Army with 400 mules came into Freland to relieve the 2nd Battalion. Meanwhile E and G Companies had advanced southeast along the high ground paralleling the Freland-Kaysersberg road towards Kaysersberg. It looked very much as though this route would be our approach to the Alsace Plain.





*"Voolay Voo Cushay Avec Mwa?"*



*"Then more fierce  
The conflict grew; the din of arms, the yell  
Of savage rage, the shriek of agony,  
The groan of death, commingled in one sound  
Of undistinguished horrors."*

*Robert Southey*

*"Schnapps is better than defilade."*

*Bieganski*

X

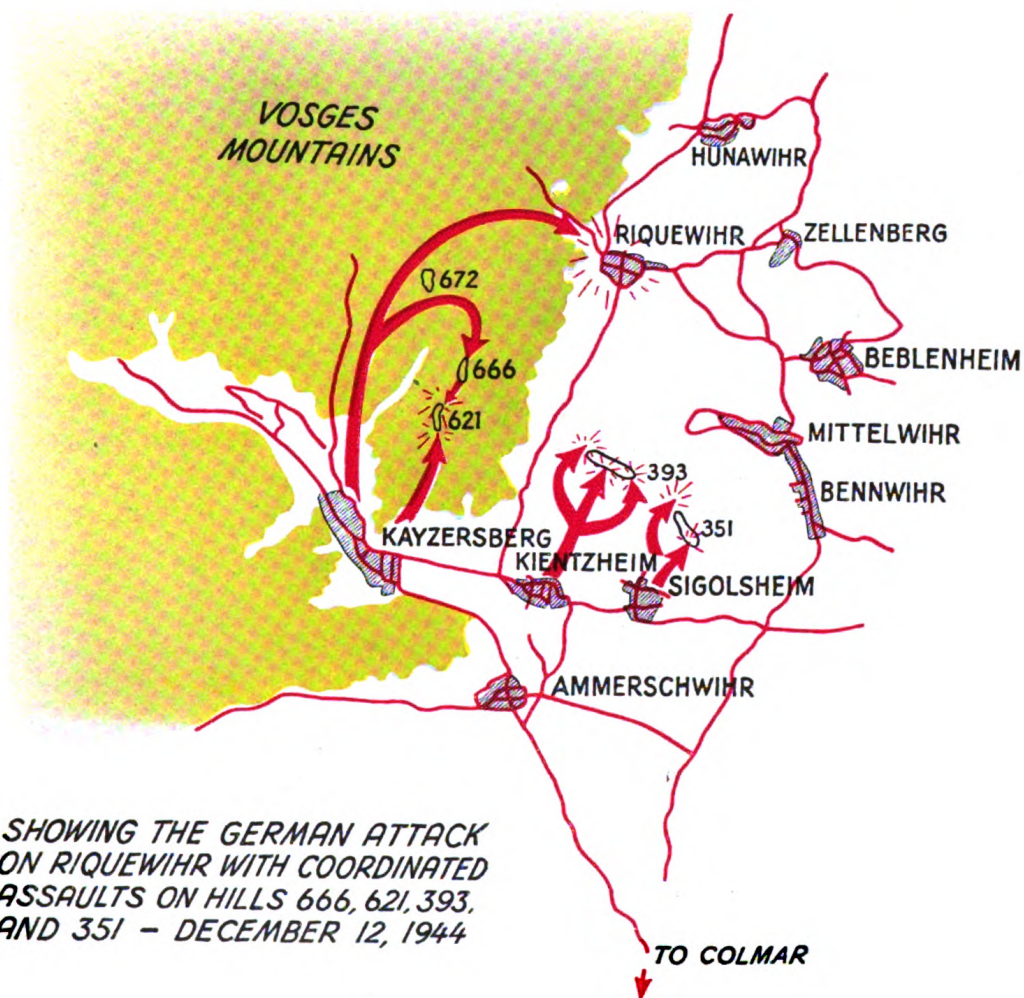
## *Riquewihr and the Colmar Pocket*

The 142nd Infantry, however, having shifted north, had broken through the St. Marie Pass and out into the Alsace Plain. Divisional operations called for a build up of strength to be poured through the opening that had been forged. On the 7th of December we climbed onto trucks and drove up and down the circuitous roads that hugged the snow covered mountain sides, through the St. Marie Pass, out into the Alsace Plain. The 1st Battalion went first to Selestat to garrison the town. The 3rd Battalion moved to Bergheim, where the regimental command post was set up. Then the 2nd Battalion continued on farther south to Hunawihr where it was attached to the 143rd Infantry and alerted to stop a German attack on a hill just north of the Kientzheim-Sigolsheim road, later known so well to the men of E and G Companies as bloody 393. It was a strange naked feeling to look out across the open Alsace Plain after months of nothing but high forested mountains ahead of us. The panoramic view of level vine covered land stretching for miles around gave us a feeling of exposure that made us a bit uneasy—like strangers just arriving in a foreign land. Here was the region of the famous Rhenish vineyards where every town was a wine town abounding in spacious, well constructed wine cellars. These large underground shelters were later to become greatly appreciated as much for the excellence of their structure as for their contents. As we came out into this great plain, little did we think that we were entering into a period of historic fighting that would rank along side of Salerno, San Pietro, the Rapido and Montélimar.

Just before dark on the 7th of December those of us in the 2nd Battalion marched south out of Hunawihr to the little town of Riquewihr, heading to relieve elements of the 143rd Infantry on the high ground ahead. We had little idea of the bitter fighting that was in store for everyone in the regiment. All that seemed to occupy our minds as we moved into position was the cold drizzling rain that

drenched the night. Actually we were being rushed forward to assist in holding two dominating terrain features—finger-like projections of the Vosges Mountains that covered the entrance to the St. Marie Pass and dominated the northern approaches to Colmar. The importance of this ground and other adjacent high ridges to the enemy was soon seen by the two weeks of savage battle that followed. Few towns in Alsace are still vivid in our minds, but none of us who participated in the fighting during this period will forget Riquewihr, Sigolsheim, Kientzheim or Kaysersberg, nor hills such as 393, 351 or 621. To those of us who were up on these scrub-brush covered hills the Riquewihr area means days and nights of ceaseless enemy artillery and mortar shells crashing all around us, continuous enemy assaults, unforgettable bayonet charges, close-in fighting with the enemy on all sides of us, and the bodies of enemy dead surrounding our mud soaked fox-holes. Here was all the hellishness of war concentrated in one area—war as only the front line dogfoot can know and understand it, stripped of its glamour and exposed as the real nightmare that it is.

Yet, as early as the 9th of December it appeared as though the enemy's ability to threaten the important high ridges could promptly be destroyed. On the 8th of December, coinciding with the regimental command post's move into Riquewihr, the 1st Battalion was moved forward from Selestat, preparatory to attacking the forward slopes of Hill 351 the following morning in a coordinated attack with the 2nd Battalion, which was to seize the forward slopes of Hill 393. Both battalions reached their objectives on the forward slopes of the hills. On Hill 351, however, friendly TD fire hit into the middle of Company B, causing 25 casualties and disorganizing the company. Company A, which had gone down the forward slope of the hill, met heavy short range self-propelled fire. In order to secure cover the company charged into Sigolsheim, never to return. Meanwhile the 2nd Battalion attack was slowed up by a strong German assault preceded by heavy artillery and mortar barrages. The main enemy effort struck at E and G Companies. Fierce fighting raged for more than an hour as the 2nd Battalion men used rifle grenades, hand grenades and every available weapon to hold off the fanatical forces, many of which charged up to their holes with bayonets. Gradually the Germans were pushed back and E and G Companies went into the attack, advancing over the bodies of the enemy dead. Five M4 tanks were called up and the men battled their way down the forward slopes of Hill 393 to the outskirts of Kientzheim. Here the advance slowed down. F Company, entirely occupied by a strong enemy force in the Bois De Kientzheim, was unable to reinforce the attacking companies. G Company's Commanding Officer was seriously wounded, slightly disorganizing the unit. As sufficient strength to press on into Kientzheim was lacking, and since the barren, vine covered frontal slopes of Hill 393 offered no suitable position for





defense, the battalion was forced to move back to the reverse slopes. We had come close to seizing one of the enemy's bases of operation.

Throughout the next two days heavy artillery and mortar fire covered our area as the Germans showed themselves determined to seize these vitally important hills. Shells crashed down on the house tops in Riquewihr, along the communication lines to the rifle companies up front and shook the high ridges that we were trying to defend. Each artillery concentration was followed up by an immediate infantry attack, but each enemy assault was hurled back as the men stubbornly held their ground. On the night of the 11th of December the 3rd Battalion relieved the 1st Battalion, which in addition to having lost a company had suffered heavy casualties. Upon the completion of this relief the 1st Battalion moved back to Riquewihr.

Throughout the 11th of December reports were received of increased vehicular activity in far off Colmar. After dark that night and throughout the early morning hours of the 12th, those of us on the forward hills could hear increased vehicular activity—tanks grinding along the roads and the clogging of horses' hoofs—in Kientzheim, Ammerschwihr and Kaysersberg. Then around nine o'clock on the morning of the 12th a German force of between 500 to 700 officer candidates infiltrated through a draw west of the Bois De Kientzheim and approached the town of Riquewihr, two kilometers to the rear. The attackers came up to the very outskirts of the town before they were discovered. Fighting from windows, doorways, towers and roof tops, our cooks, drivers and clerks picked up carbines and rifles and fired into the advancing forces. The remnants of the 1st Battalion were rushed to the threatened section of the town. Replacements received their first baptism of fire in carrying ammunition up forward to the hard pressed riflemen and machine gunners. By eleven o'clock the situation in Riquewihr had cleared up and countless enemy dead and wounded littered the streets.

Simultaneous with the attack on Riquewihr another attack was launched against the rifle companies on Hills 393 and 621, striking with the greatest fury at Company F. Grimly the men fought off the onslaught, knowing that a battle was also raging in the rear. Enemy pressure continued throughout the remainder of the 12th. Early the next morning some of the original force that had attacked Riquewihr attacked Co. F's Command Post from Hill 666 in the rear. Savage fighting raged for two hours with friendly mortar and artillery shells crashing down on every side of the F Company men before the assault was repulsed.

Although the enemy had been decisively routed after each assault, his determination to continue attacking was not lessened. During the night of the 13th the skyline around Hill 393 was particularly brilliant as the enemy threw in one of the heaviest artillery concentrations of the war. The shells came crashing in just after

an Engineer outfit had taken over E and G Companies' positions. A savage German infantry assault followed the artillery barrage, resulting in the capture of one Engineer platoon, heavy casualties and loss of the hill. Although battle weary and tired, the men of E and G Companies returned and fought their way back up the hill. Aided by two M4 tanks they succeeded in retaking all but a small pocket on the very summit by darkness of the 14th.

From the 14th to the 17th, I, K and E Companies participated in continuous local attacks and counterattacks against the unceasing efforts of the Germans to establish and reinforce strong points on the top of Hills 351 and 393. Over on Hill 621, F Company was engaged in similar activity. The enemy assaults never seemed to let up as the Germans remained determined to gain the highly sought ground; yet we fought them to a standstill.

Gradually the offensive was taken away from the fanatically charging enemy. Early in the afternoon of the 17th of December, F and G Companies, supported by a company of hard-hitting, French manned Sherman tanks from the 5th French Armored Division, attacked the fortress town of Kientzheim. Moving down the forward slope of the saddle between Hills 393 and 621 across open vineyards, the tanks and infantry advanced under heavy artillery, self-propelled and anti-tank fire. The tanks sped to the only entrances to the town—one on the east side and one on the west side—and entered the town as the men from F and G Companies, unable to move with the speed of the tanks, advanced over the exposed terrain and crossed a moat protecting the northern approaches to the Thirteenth Century citadel. In less than an hour organized resistance ceased with more than 100 prisoners captured, including a miscellaneous collection of loaded supply wagons and staff cars. Mopping up of isolated resistance continued until the early morning hours as the spasmodic crackle of small arms echoed through the walled Alsatian village. Late at night enemy tanks just outside the town continued to send shell after shell crashing into the settlement. Early the next morning more than 600 rounds an hour of mixed artillery poured in, but no counterattack developed. Kientzheim remained ours.

Meanwhile the 3rd Battalion in attempting to attack Sigolsheim had run into heavy small arms fire on Hill 351 and was unable to move armor support up the muddy slopes of the hill to press their attack. Sigolsheim remained in German hands.

At eight o'clock on the 18th of December, G Company, with the same French armor, advanced on Kaysersberg across a one kilometer wide, vine covered flat patch of ground. As the troops left the west gate of Kientzheim three enemy tanks opened fire between them and their objective. For 20 minutes a tank battle raged; all three German tanks were knocked out by the French tanks, and the outskirts of

Kaysersberg were reached by eleven o'clock. Inside the town the tempo of battle was reduced to a systematic house to house fight with the American infantry and French tanks overcoming resistance in almost every house in the face of heavy bazooka and machine gun fire. Late in the afternoon the heaviest opposition was encountered in a fortified strongpoint in the heart of the city. Finally, after holding out for two hours, the enemy garrison surrendered, yielding one German Colonel complete with his staff and approximately 60 SS and Gestapo troops.



After dark the French armor headed for Ammerschwihr. F Company was marched from Kientzheim to its assistance. Finding the bridges across the swollen stream between Kientzheim and Ammerschwihr destroyed, the company was forced to march by way of Kaysersberg through the rain drenched darkness. Long before daylight the men of Company F joined the French tanks and moved in on the burning and shell flattened town against light opposition.

Late in the day we were relieved by elements of the 3rd Infantry Division. Kientzheim, Kaysersberg and Ammerschwihr, the towns from which the enemy had mounted his entire offensive, were completely occupied. Few of us will forget the long march back to Riquewihr over the ground we had fought so long and hard to hold and the feeling of relief that at last a rest was in store for us. Little did we realize at the time the importance of our actions—how much we had contributed toward checking the attempts of the Nineteenth German Army to cut off our division and close the St. Marie Pass. Yet, months later when the President of the United States awarded the 2nd Battalion, which had been on position continuously, the Distinguished Unit Citation, no one denied that it had been well earned.



*"The Rhine! The Rhine! a blessing on the Rhine!"*

*Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*

## XI

### *Christmas Interlude*

Leaving Riquewihr we mounted trucks and moved north to the Strasbourg area. By the early morning hours of the 20th, the last units of the regiment had closed into our new sector. The command group moved into the Strasbourgeon suburb of Illkirch-Graffenstaden. The 1st and 3rd Battalions occupied the area between the Rhone-Rhine Canal and the Rhine River, with the 1st Battalion Command Post set up in Stockfeld and the 3rd in Neuhof. The 2nd Battalion, going into a reserve status, occupied the town of Wolfisheim.

Although the Germans were just across the Rhine, Strasbourg and its environs were peaceful compared to the rest of France bordering Germany. For the 1st and 3rd Battalions there were outposts along the Rhine to maintain. Enemy vehicles were occasionally heard across the river, trip flares planted by our Engineers often illuminated the night watch on the Rhine and occasionally the brrrrp of a "rat" pistol raced through the air. Goebbels styled propaganda, boomed over a public address system across the river, tried futilely to convince us that the Germans would return to the Alsatian capital. But despite these reminders of war Strasbourg was a quiet sector and a pleasant contrast to the days of violent fighting we had just been through. People roamed the streets. There was beer and wine aplenty. Young girls, pretty and well dressed, blossomed out occasionally in their Alsatian costumes with parti-coloured bodice and full skirts with white lace aprons. Dances added to our entertainment. Some of us made premature acquaintances with Russian DP's. Most of us enjoyed Christmas turkey, complete with table service and decorously printed menus, while others absented themselves from the mess hall and enjoyed the hospitality of civilian home cooking. The suburbs, with their narrow, crooked streets and steep roofed, half timbered houses often huddled together within ramparts entered by a medieval gateway, were thoroughly civilized hamlets and not unenjoyable places to be for the holidays.

No less timely than Scrouge's magnificent goose was our finest Christmas present. After 132 consecutive days of combat, which included every type of warfare except jungle fighting, our Division was relieved. With the pleasant knowledge that we were destined for the rear and that no action more violent than the much needed training could be expected for a month, we pulled out of the Strasbourg area on the morning of the 26th of December and moved to an even more peaceful sector just a few miles southwest of Sarrebourg. The sobering events of the breakthrough in the Ardennes, now slowed but still unchecked, seemed very far away at the time, and the growing tension created by unusual enemy aggression in our own Seventh Army sector had not yet reached us. We made plans for a long stay.

There was nothing comfortable about Lorquin and vicinity; none of the fine buildings of Strasbourg were handy for billets or dances. The half dozen towns that we occupied were small and crowded, and our company streets were piled with the unpleasant landmarks so common to rural France. Despite these conditions, lumber began to appear for mess hall tables. A few small Wirtschafts, if they could be spared from sleepers, were converted into Rec halls, and in Lorquin where the 3rd Battalion stayed, the city hall became a useable EM club. Movies were set up. Some of us went hunting in the surrounding woods and demonstrated that our marksmanship had not suffered. We got well acquainted with our new replacements while enjoying the fruits of rear echelon life.

Those last days of 1944 were cold. But the sun shone brightly and our situation was peaceful, a vast improvement over the vineyards of Riquewihr and the foxholes of the Vosges. Practically everyone celebrated the coming of 1945 with a semblance of the American method. A few of us were permitted to return to the Strasbourg area to renew old acquaintances. It was an enjoyable way to end the year.



*"The first snow came.  
How beautiful it was,  
Falling so silently  
All day long, all night long,  
On roofs of the living,  
On graves of dead."  
John Greenleaf Whittier*

## XII

### *Winter in Northern Alsace*

The passing of the old year marked the end of the relaxation and the end of our relief. New Years Day found the Seventh Army situation growing critical. Repeated crossings of the Rhine near Strasbourg by German patrols foreshadowed a larger bridgehead to come. Closer yet, the enemy was counterattacking in the Bitche area, and his alarming successes began to fill the news broadcasts. Following the truths came the fiction and with the fiction came the alarm. Powerful tank thrusts, air invasions, mass crossings of the Rhine, were reports confirmed for us by two disheartening facts: Headquarters, Seventh Army was pulling out of Saverne and moving to the rear, and more striking, the 141st Infantry was going back into the lines.

At 0900, on the first day of 1945, we were placed on a three hour alert. Kitchens were loaded, ammunition set to roll, and early in the afternoon the order came for movement to Waldhambach, a little town too close to Bitche for comfort. The 3rd Battalion moved first, passed through Sarrebourg and reached the area of Montbronn just after dark. Because of the hurried commitment to stop the increasing enemy counterattacks, the entire route was a jam of trucks, tanks and artillery. For long stretches of icy roads convoys moved two abreast. Sarrebourg was a center of snarled traffic and confusion. Everyone who was moving back seemed unusually anxious to keep moving, and yet we were headed to meet whatever was the cause of this anxiety. Many of the bridges that we crossed were already covered with heavy charges to be ignited if and when the mounting counteroffensive got out of hand. It was not a very happy New Year.

The first mad night of the new assignment, which turned out to be that of assisting the 100th Division, was probably the worst of that particular mission. Little information, other than magnified rumors, ever reached the first to move in.

The 3rd Battalion effected their relief on a wooded ridgeline overlooking Lemberg, a tiny hot-spot northeast of Montbronn. The 2nd Battalion moved into a defensive position in the vicinity of Goetzenbruck and St. Louis and the 1st Battalion outposted Montbronn where our Regimental Headquarters vied for the space of the 100th Division Command Post. By midnight the 141st Combat Team had closed into its new area . . . and into its old activity.

Those first days in the Bitche area were for many the worst of the war. The fact that the Germans were really on the offensive was fully substantiated. Snow lay deep on the hard frozen ground, and the ominous, non-directional sounds of armor echoed through the splintered woods and hollows. Dawn found the situation critical in many sectors. Probably hardest hit of all was surrounded I Company which had been ordered to hold a protruding portion of the Lemberg ridge. Our mission, we learned, was to protect the weak right flank of the 100th Division with whom we had no contact, and to stem an attack that had the impetus of a three day start. Even who we were fighting was a matter of doubt, for the treacherous Krauts were found to be using American tanks as well as dressing in American and British uniforms.

When three or four machine pistols are powdering the snow around your neck and 88's are chopping firewood overhead, you aren't too greatly concerned about such a general thing as straightening out a defense line, but that was actually our job. It was like trying to straighten five miles of twisted rail after a train wreck. Along our line there were gaps to be filled, isolated squads and platoons to save, tanks to be met, and terrorizing reports to be checked and dismissed as fables, or met with hurried strength if found to be true. It was evident that Jerry had his mind made up to go someplace, and though we might change his mind at noon, there was nothing to assure us that nightfall wouldn't find him with the same idea. As if this wasn't enough, we were now fighting in a section of France where many of its people were sympathetic with the Nazis. In one instance a wholesale plot to sabotage our defensive positions and routes of communication was uncovered. Curfews were set and strictly enforced. We could trust no one. The most haggard refugee might well be an enemy agent slipped through to scout our positions. In one case of deception a familiar artillery observation plane with unidentifiable markings flew over our lines for two straight days, and shellings, too accurate for coincidence, followed after each flight. Because of the necessary counterintelligence precautions, and because several different outfits, including some French, were represented in our sector, signs and countersigns became an important part of the operation.

By noon of the second day we were pretty well aware of what was up; and the prospects for heavy fighting were much too good. Company I, just north of

Lemberg, had one platoon completely cut off, and enemy armor and infantry had worked into the area of a second. Further south around Goetzenbruck, attacks were coming from all directions. Our own tanks pulled back, leaving G Company to hold the neighboring village of Sarriensburg, while just to the south and west of these towns, F Company had gone into Meisenthal and was set up for expected attacks from the woods to the east. Also unneglected was E Company, the farthest unit of the 2nd Battalion to the north, which was receiving almost constant trouble from infiltrating Germans.

Company I, with one platoon of L Company, continued to hold, and the 1st Battalion, despite warm reception, had moved up between Inchenberg and Lemberg to a hill abreast of them. It was here that the leading squad of Company B, expecting to relieve elements of the 399th Infantry, found Germans occupying the dug-in positions. They were pinned down less than 50 yards from the enemy. When one or two hopeful Krauts stood up and beckoned them to surrender, the squad attacked and took over the emplacements.

Meanwhile the 2nd Battalion had turned the tables on the aggressive enemy with an attack east from the towns of Goetzenbruck and Sarriensburg. So unexpected was this uprising in the face of their offensive, the Germans became completely disorganized for a time and were never able to renew their attack in this sector. During this thrust, which regained several key points surrounding the towns, our Cannon Company rolled their M-7 persuaders within 100 yards of German forward positions and literally blasted them from the earth. There wasn't even so much as an enemy patrol around Goetzenbruck for four days following the encounter.

By the third day the line was slowly and painfully beginning to straighten, but in order to save our positions—and without too much imagination, probably Sarrebourg as well—a platoon had to be moved here, then there to meet the numerous threats, a small herd of Germans had to be cleaned out from behind the lines, and the abundant artillery had to be placed quickly and accurately. The Germans continued to pound at Lemberg. Two battalions were identified in front of our 2nd Battalion. Mouterhouse was the reported assembly area of armor. Yet with all these alarming indications the offensive subsided and reverted to the old familiar, “stagnant warfare”.

Our total time in this area was just over three weeks, but practically all our casualties were suffered in the first four days of bitter defense.

Toward the middle of the month we were relieved by the 142nd Infantry, and instead of training we hacked away at the frozen earth preparing defensive positions just behind the active line—just in case. This done we resumed our place in the defense.



DEFENSE AT MONTBRONN







*"Frozen ground or no frozen ground--that guy's got it made!"*

By this time Jerry was fairly disappointed, his desire to visit Sarrebourg being no greater than our desire to visit Bitche, a few roller-coaster miles to the north. He had attacked, expecting to find but little. He met the T-Patch. Mention this insignia to any German and chances are he'll cross himself. Morale was pretty low across the way, according to the few prisoners. To them the war was nearing the close, and besides, our artillery was playing havoc with their general housekeeping. Both the 1st and 3rd Battalions reported much yelling and confusion following a well timed, well placed 81 mm. mortar barrage on a German luncheon, disclosed by the tell-tale rattle of the horse drawn mess carts.

After January 5th Jerry quit coming at us. He merely sat back and shot—an old German occupation.



In addition to knowing that we had handled well a tough job, the offensives launched by our First, Third and Ninth Armies up North, and the nonstop tour of Poland and Eastern Germany conducted by our Red Allies, all served to restir that September hope of an early end to the war. Even the vapour trails that lingered behind the massive fleets of our bombers seemed to be pointing the inevitable way of the Western Allies.

Following this direction we pulled out of the Bitche area on the night of



January 23rd and moved by truck through the Saverne Gap into a quiet area just east of Saverne itself. We were in VI Corps reserve at the time, a pleasant status, except for the realization that such is only temporary. The heavy snows that had cut our visibility and concealed our numerous patrols in the final days of our previous mission continued to fall.

For three days in the towns of Monswiller, Ernolsheim, Steinbourg and Eckartswiller we continued the training that was so discouragingly interrupted on New Year's Day. Reinforcements had joined us. Molding a fighting team, however, is not a matter of three days work. All our efforts along the lines of polishing our tired but battle proven unit seemed to be thwarted by the fact that the war had to be fought almost every day. There was so much to be done, and so little time in which to do it.

This time the interruption came January 29th, when we rejoined the 36th Division in the table lands of the Rhine Valley about 15 miles north of Strasbourg. Here again we were to fight and suffer, and to resume the job of pushing the German soldier back into his proper place in oblivion, or Germany.

Spring made its début as the month ended. All the snow of January seemed to disappear overnight.

Our new terrain was somewhat similar to that of Riquewihr; flat, dangerously open and pocked with the familiar Alsatian villages, made totally unattractive by the frequent exchanges of war. The countless little streams that crisscrossed this "Jungland" of the Rhine became swollen, swift flowing torrents that spread beyond the confines of their beds and made lakes out of the surrounding bottoms. Roads, too, became streams. Many had to be made passable by logging for long stretches. It was unseasonably warm for February, but much too wet to be

enjoyed, and our foxholes filled to the brim as rapidly as they were dug. Spring was not altogether welcome.

To begin our work in this area, the 2nd Battalion and Anti-Tank Company which had been attached to the 143rd Infantry for a few days rejoined us and took up positions in the outskirts of the Bois De Langenau, a small patch of woods about a mile from the town of Herrlisheim. We were to hear more of Herrlisheim a little later on. At the same time the 1st Battalion moved into the crowded town of Gries and the 3rd Battalion closed in on the right in Kurtzenhausen.

Again that old feeling of uneasiness returned. We were pretty sure the Germans were back in their defensive rut after their unsuccessful flareup in January, but the comparative quiet across those open expanses that separated us from the Rhine only increased the tension. Up in Oberhoffen our sister regiment, the 142nd Infantry, was in the thick of a hot one, and down toward Strasbourg the French were pressing the very tip of the German holdings on the Allied side of the river. Patrols who waded their way toward the enemy at night were made uncomfortably public on the bare table top by flares from positions near Oberhoffen, Herrlisheim, and Drusenheim, and during the day time it wasn't quite safe to do too much waving, because there was no reason, other than poor eyesight, why an unfriendly machine gunner 1500 yards away couldn't spray the general area.



The Germans seemed to have had their defenses generally along the Moder River, which curled out of Haguenau, through Bischwiller to our north and then joined the smaller Zorn to proceed to the Rhine. The story got about that we were going to cross another river, but this was rather ambiguous since continuing warm weather and now rains had made rivers out of every ditch around us.

We had a lot of Engineers hanging around at the time. Quantities of their bridging equipment were there also. But when the rubber boats appeared we knew what was in store. This was preparation for the attack on Herrlisheim, an offensive that turned into a withdrawal, a march across open ground that actually developed into a swim.

For those who have never seen this place it is hard to fully understand the disaster. Flat ground has often been described as being like a billiard table. Herrlisheim is no exception. From the positions in the eastern edge of the Langenau woods, as well as from the Stainwald patch or from Gambsheim, the complete profile of our objective could be seen. Equally as well, the enemy, known to be in Offendorf and dug in along the edge of Herrlisheim, had as little difficulty in observing any trespassing across the open land. Running generally north and south

along the road from Gambenheim to Herrlisheim was a railroad bed set high to avoid just such floods as were now taking place. This bed, along with a few scattered trees on the western edge of town and along the road, offered the only protection from complete observation. It was like trying to run the length of a football field with the enemy sitting in the stands. Such a thing as a covered route of approach for the 3rd Battalion, selected to strike from the south, was non-existent.

Being attacked was nothing new to this naked town. Some weeks previous, tanks of the 12th Armored Division had rumbled across the same barren fields in hopes of breaking the German foothold in this corner of France, and the iron shells of defeat still remained. From the air, pilots claimed these tanks that were destroyed gave the appearance of an armored group still in formation for an attack, so accurately and so heavy was the fire from Germans guns. With this undisturbed evidence before them, the 3rd Battalion moved out into the darkness of the first hours of morning in hopes of taking Herrlisheim by surprise.

Continual rains had caused the Zorn River to rise four feet during the night and the two bridges, one foot and one treadway, that the Engineers were constructing, were necessarily late in completion.

The general plan was that I Company on the right should cross the treadway and, guiding on the highway, move northeast into the town. Company K, farther north, was to cross the River Zorn and guide on it into Herrlisheim. Tanks were then supposed to follow and deliver their power where it was needed. Success for the entire operation depended upon the element of surprise and upon the ability to

maintain contact in the dark. None of the softening agency of artillery was to proceed the advance.

Moving into Herrlisheim that dark morning will be remembered by many as more of a matter of swimming than walking. Great stretches of water expanded by the rains of that night were waist deep. Often beneath all this water was a sheet of ice that had been flooded before the sudden thaw could melt it. Movement was painful, slow and unsure across the 1200 yards, and the ever present possibility of



*"... No sense of both of us crossing that open field.  
I'll stay here and cover you from this pill-box...."*



mines was no comfort. Constant falling because of the slick mud or ice, or the complete submerging in some hidden hole or ditch, drenched clothing and clogged rifles. Herrlisheim seemed very far away. One huge lake caused I Company to proceed more north than east at the beginning of the march, and the two attacking companies were side by side when the first chatter of German machine guns revealed that the enemy was there—and awake. Despite the difficulty of such a movement everything was pretty well under control when flaming rags ignited by one of our rockets lighted the cellar of a house on the edge of town and gave our leading elements their first indication that Herrlisheim was but a hundred yards ahead. Not long after, dawn outlined the safety of the buildings and everyone dashed for them. Open ground is dangerous at night, but death in daylight.



Full light found the situation more than serious. The houses that we had taken were in the center of a strongly defended German position supported by fire from emplacements along the southern edge of town and along the banks of the canal. Attempts by leaders to dash from house to house in order to reorganize proved futile in the face of grazing fire from enemy held houses, and fighting became more a matter of private groups hopelessly struggling against an organized enemy.

The tanks assembled behind the bridge never crossed because of accurate fire from nearby Offendorf. The 1st Battalion had reached the objective line north of Herrlisheim, but neither they nor the 2nd Battalion could do anything in the way of reinforcing since crossing the open tract would have been mass suicide in the light of day. With the apparent build up of enemy power and with the bitter knowledge that the supporting tanks were still back beyond the river, the situation was deemed hopeless. Both units had suffered heavily during the approach march and the house fighting, and weapons, fouled with mud and water, refused to func-

tion. Some men had to stop and clean their usually reliable M-1's in order to fire a single shot. By noon the ammunition supply was dangerously low with no chance for resupply. Further attempts to expand their position and continue the attack were impossible. It was a matter of being annihilated or captured, or attempting the dangerous withdrawal back across the open wasteland.



Little can be said about the withdrawal, if it can be termed such, other than it was a case of letting fly with what you had and getting the hell out. It was in this phase of the battle that we lost most heavily. Wounded had to crawl or be helped through the same flooded areas, back past the mangled hulks that monumented the first deadly failure at Herrlisheim. It is likely that some of the wounded may have drowned in their effort to swim the canal. A bitter, miserable group

reached the safety of the woods, cold, wet, without weapons or helmets. Nearly a hundred remained behind.

The lesson at Herrlisheim was too expensive to be forgotten.

Two days later we moved out and relieved the 314th Infantry southeast of Haguenau.

The remaining two weeks' stay in the Moder River area was marked by consistently warm days. Fighting became heavy patrolling for the most part, sweating out the frequent shellings, and manning outposts and defensive positions around such beaten places as Bischwiller, Kaltenhaus, Rohrwiller and once again, Herrlisheim.

Perhaps this semi-lull could be called the period of "night lights", for it was here the nervous enemy kept the sky aglow with his ambered colored flares. One patrol of ours was actually fired on by flares. Our contribution to the illumination was the weird "artificial moonlight". First tried in Italy and found successful, it made daytime a matter of 24 hours in the February days in the Rhine Valley land. At first sight of these huge beams, starting apparently from nowhere and hugging the earth deep into the enemy lines, many of us thought that Aurora Borealis was performing out of season, or that divine intervention was lighting the way for something supernatural. Actually these giant shafts were the products of eight million candle power searchlights set up some ten miles behind us and directed at the sky for reflection on cloudy nights, and at the ground in general when the skies were clear. It did make seeing an easier task, both for our front line watch and

for blackout drivers, but when our own patrols headed out across the river or across the flatlands it was better to turn them off.

This was also a period of unit restlessness. Two days in one place, just sufficient time to plug a hole in a roof or effect a meager cover for a dugout, and then down the line to newer and wetter positions to take up the watch again.

In one of these moves we ended up in Herrlisheim and surroundings, the town itself having been entered quietly by other troops one day after our disastrous attack. The Germans had withdrawn and were now defending along a line marked by pillboxes and heavy woods. To the north Drusenheim continued to be the center of activity. The 143rd Infantry had long been locked in rugged battle in and around this hub. On the tenth of the month three of their companies were badly hit by counterattacks from the east and were temporarily driven out of the town, an experience similar to our Herrlisheim fight of a week before. To bolster this sector, the 2nd Battalion was taken from us, placed with the 143rd Infantry to work over the dug in positions and pillboxes located southeast of Drusenheim and near the river. Such operations were hampered by fire delivered from the German side of the Rhine.

At the same time the 1st Battalion closed into Rohrwiller with its mines and booby-traps, and the 3rd Battalion, along with the regimental command post, was trucked into Herrlisheim. By now the only thing that remained untouched in this beaten town was a simple stork's nest that perched high and defiant on top of the ruined church.

Though the following week could hardly be called quiet, what with long range machine gun fire spattering around, and with every conceivable type of enemy HE singing in, still it wasn't a bad deal compared to previous experiences. There was a lot of patrolling to be done (someone is always demanding fresh prisoners to question), and small positions to clean up, and the nights were invariably filled with some sort of trouble or other. The Rhine began to feel the burden of the early thaw, flooding all but a few of the outposts dug near her banks.

It was here that we got our first glimpse of a jet-propelled plane, and discovered new Deutsch devilment in undetectable glass land mines. The loudest noise of the year also came at this time. One thousand mines, stacked in a cemetery near Rohrwiller, blew up leaving a 50 foot crater, a few soldier and civilian casualties, several flattened houses, and a very startled USO Show that was playing in the Rathaus two miles over in Herrlisheim. Incidentally it is believed that this troupe brought the USO banner closer to the front lines than ever before.

On the 21st of the month the French made their appearance and informed us that they were taking over our ponds and booby-traps. Our new destination, we learned, was the glorious rear.



For the duration of February and four days of March we trained and paraded and used our headlights at night in the country area around Hohatzenheim about ten miles in back of Brumath. The weather cleared for the most part and stayed warm. It was nice to know that a barrage shaking a hillside a few fields over was merely Charlie Company fulfilling the S-3's demand for 0930—1030 hours.

There were movies almost every night, and if they didn't appear or if the generator went on the bum, there were parties, beer assemblies and small jam sessions. In addition to our training during the day we were honored with the presentation of individual awards for outstanding heroism during the past periods of combat.

Probably the most unique and thoroughly enjoyable part of the interlude was the accuracy in the estimation of time allowed for these things. Most of our previous programs of rest and training were suddenly interrupted by an unexpected thrust of the Germans or a hasty full strength attack that would carry us, blankets flying and kitchens trailing, back into the lines. But this was slated to last ten days, and happily enough it was ten full days. On schedule, March 4th, we moved into Haguenau and opened another chapter in the regiment's long history.



*" . . . the accent of a coming foot,  
The opening of a door."*

*Emily Dickinson*

### XIII

## *Haguenau-Siegfried Offensive*

If the roads aren't completely bottomless with mud, Haguenau is about a ten minute drive from Bischwiller. Tourists, if there are any, generally approach the place from Saverne, but we were hardly sightseeing when we visited it in March, so we followed our MSR from quaint Brumath, speeded up to pass the one or two favorite spots that Jerry accurately pulverized for several weeks, and effected the relief that started us on our last bitter phase of the war.

Like most French towns with two or more tracks running through, Haguenau was classified as a rail center. Since late November it had served as a battleground, often with certain rubbled streets marking the division between the Wehrmacht and the Allies. The 45th Division first littered the town with their northward push after breaking through the Saverne Gap Thanksgiving night, and later when the German counterattack crashed into the Seventh Army it served as a hub for both the enemy's offense and our defense. Innumerable rounds of artillery, arched from guns American and German, had shattered this near sieged city for nearly four months. The small arms spatterings from a score of bitter street fights had left their unmistakable brand around the doors and windows of those structures still standing.

For the most part, the civilians of Haguenau seemed indifferent to the progress of war, other than the daily misfortune that was their lot. To them war was a continual affliction. It's surprising the number that remained, even in the most desolate areas. A lot of help was offered and given by some of them, but then there were those who were German in birth as well as in sympathy, and they gave no cheers for the liberators. One old man explained with some indignation that he had slept nightly since Christmas in the safety of a big champagne cellar, but that American Engineers now kept him awake till midnight with their motion picture machine.

In between the twisted railyards and the center of town it wasn't too bad, but when our business carried us into the large city square or into one of the ruins near the Moder itself, then your chances for getting caught in a street sweeping job by an MG-42, firing from across the stream, were pretty good. Also, three months of familiarization with every house, archway and alley left little adjusting to be done by enemy artillery observers.

Naturally, it was into this dangerous part of the city that we went. The 1st Battalion occupied the left flank of the sector, taking positions for the most part along the edge of the Moder, with one platoon of A Company in a few houses on the German side. The 3rd Battalion served as the right flank, while the second rested in temporary reserve in the towns of Batzendorf and Harthausen, both handily within the range of Jerry's cannon. The enemy held the most uncomfortable part of Haguenau, with positions north of the river and in the woods that hemmed the town. Curious to see whom he would be fighting the next few days, he kept the sky well lighted during the exchange. Still curious the next morning, 30 Jerrys attempted to cross the river near Kaltenhaus but were dispersed by fire from the 3rd Battalion mortars.

Probably the most precarious place in Haguenau was the four house bridgehead that was turned over to us by the 143rd and which was the object of the German efforts. Shells dropped in constantly, once so heavily that three of the houses were destroyed and the ruins were temporarily abandoned. Shortly afterwards the places were retaken along with two new houses, but they too were eventually demolished.

In looking back on our labors since New Years, it was noticed that we hadn't done much gaining or liberating. Any big movements we made were parallel to the enemy's line and not through it. We had been fighting pretty steadily—no shortage of work in this game—but our fighting was unlike any before in France. At times our struggle had been to hold what was already ours, and if you are successful at this you don't move at all. With this somewhat stable situation, come the numerous patrols; small groups of men whose job it is to leave the beauty of the squad area and poke around in places they have no business. Haguenau, like Herrlisheim and Montbronn, was one of those places.

"Don't let him rest. Let's see what he's doing over there. Find out where he is, then come back. But when you come, bring one of them with you so we can see what he has to say about it. Be careful because the whole damn place is one big mine field. Take three men with you."

Such instructions were frequent during our two weeks stay at Haguenau.

The Moder, normally what we would call a creek, was still violent from the early warmth and rain. In some places it was eight feet deep and about 40 or 50 feet wide. The steep banks on either side made swimming a poor solution for

crossing. Nevertheless the river was crossed, time and time again, and our patrols ranged deep into the enemy held part of Haguenau. The prisoners that returned did not hesitate to describe their unfortunate state. One, which was taken to the regimental command post, openly revealed the low morale of his diminished outfit and requested that he be permitted to broadcast a surrender plea to his comrades. He felt sure that verbal persuasion could bring them in. Division stated that a raiding party might be the needed pressure to bring the Germans to their knees.

We spent eleven days in Haguenau. Except for the final attack they were days of sporadic firing and intermittent artillery and the nights were full of patrols, flares and the sound of armor moving in and moving out. It was also our first inland experience with life preservers. Over all was a mounting feeling of a pending push. To the north the Germans were being driven back across the Rhine and it seemed evident that their stay in this little corner of France would not be too long.

On the morning of March 10th, Company B, which had relieved Able Company in the small foothold over the river, took five more houses, but aroused a German counterattack that developed into an all day affair. By extensive use of bazookas they drove our men back toward the bridge and into the original holding. This ugly half acre, which consisted of ten badly beaten houses all standing in a row facing the river, was bounded on the north by a very active cemetery whose high walls made a natural lurking place for the resisting Krauts. As the time passed our efforts slowly turned, almost completely, to this contended strip.

Three days later the 2nd Battalion, which had taken over the 1st Battalion's sector, launched an early morning surprise attack on the enemy forces and succeeded in enlarging our area on the north side of the Moder. Thirty-six prisoners, some with medals showing they had fought on the Eastern Front, were taken. The short attack was preceded by a torrent of artillery fire that was centered around the cemetery and its neighboring buildings. Machine guns raked every possible haven of enemy in the rubble defense, and our troops moved in without the usual interference of German small arms. So violent had been our preparatory fire that many of the thickly sewn mine fields were laid bare by the pulverizing effects.

Later on, however, the Krauts came back, on foot and in tanks, and by nightfall the muzzles of the Tigers were poking into the houses held by the two forward companies. Our own armor was balked by the stream, so artillery was the feeble solution for halting the onslaught. Even Division was concerned about this particular situation and ordered that a bazooka team would knock out the tanks before morning, but daylight found the giants still at large. By noon, though, most of the area was still in our hands and the fury of the enemy effort had spent itself. Each defensive unit in a house (or reasonable facsimile) was furnished with a bazooka team which fired so effectively that the armor slowly backed away.

One of these tanks, about the size of a small warehouse, was dubbed the "Monster" by our supporting tankmen.

With the information secured during the battle, the German force along the regimental front was estimated to be about 300 Infantrymen with a few tanks and self-propelled guns.

On the 14th of March came the unforgettable Seventh Army order that sprung us from the banks of the black Moder, through the last remaining miles of France, and into the battered German frontier. Already the other Armies were gaining impetus in the drive to fracture the backbone of the German Westwall, and our successes were soon to bring the pressure necessary for the cave-in of the Southern defenses.

According to the order . . . and the French civilians . . . the push would begin early March 15th, preceded by an unequaled concentration of artillery all along the line.

Preparations were made to construct two bridges across the river, both sturdy enough to support our tanks. Other lumber and steel would be hauled conspicuously further down stream to mislead the Germans while one of our unengaged units pulled a phony attack on the left flank for the same purpose.

Our immediate mission was to seize the main highway cutting through the dense Haguenau Forest in order to insure a good supply route for the VI Corps. The French on our right, travelling in the same direction most of the time, were to destroy the opposition in their immediate sector and proceed through the same forest closer to the Rhine.

The long barrage that was promised began late in the evening. Like the expressive overture to a great opera it grew in intensity, then subsided, then grew again to a trembling, climactic finish as the curtain was raised. Each of us had listened to the reading of the order that promised to make the Wehrmacht and its Nazi overseers just another dirty chapter in history, and our hopes were high as we began the drive.

The 1st Battalion crossed the Moder with but meager opposition, established a strong bridgehead, then proceeded north cutting the highway running from Marxenhausen to Camp D'Oberhoffen. After daylight the 2nd Battalion crossed their new bridge, cracked the resistance around Marxenhausen and prepared for the push through the woods. By noon the 1st Battalion was well on its way to the positions around the beaten German barracks just outside of town, and the 2nd Battalion was simultaneously cleaning up remaining resistance around Marxenhausen and North Haguenau. That afternoon Jerry disproved the rumor that he was low on ammunition. The next morning the 1st and 3rd Battalions were well started on their dash through the dangerous Haguenau Forest. It was known that



Northern Alsace  
HAGUENAU AREA



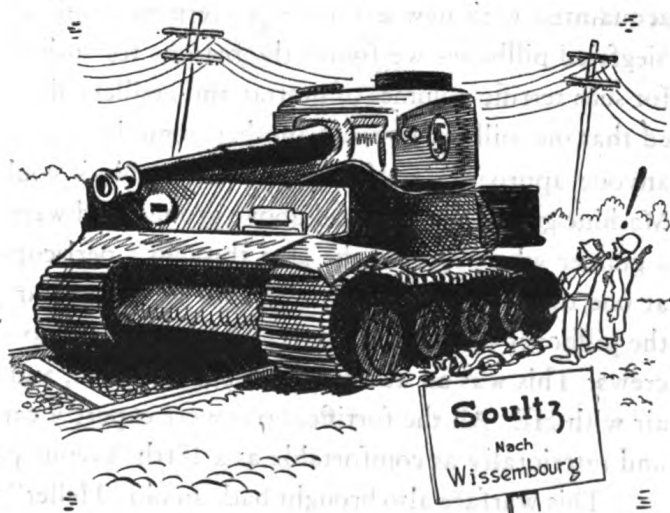


the Germans were withdrawing as rapidly as possible in hopes of reorganizing at another line—perhaps the Siegfried. Those that lingered in their old familiar haunts were properly handled by the 2nd Battalion who remained for that purpose.

Even with tanks by our side, and only an occasional sniper to pop at us, it wasn't very comfortable. Footless Germans, maimed in their flight by the mines they had planted for our feet, were sprawled throughout the spongy floor of the woods, and served as fearful warning as to what to expect.

Despite these delays, the two battalions pushed on, the 1st skirting the woods on the left and the 3rd sweeping past numerous road blocks on the main highway. By late afternoon on the 17th of March little remained of the German resistance, except a few scattered, unitless Supermen, many of whom were looking for a new and peaceful home.

From Surbourg at the north end of the forest, the two lead battalions mounted two-and-a-halves driven by our own mud splitting Nighthawks and began a fitful but pleasant "rat-race" to the German border. In the course of this dash, a comparatively short hop to the veterans of Southern France, we passed the "Monster" sitting on the outskirts of Soultz, bloated by a direct hit from a bomb. A few of our stragglers, absent on wine reconnaissance, were left in the rush, but these cases were rare and our 2nd Battalion arrived intact at Riedseltz about dusk that night. The bridges along the route were either destroyed or badly damaged, but luck was with us on the bypasses. Had this not been so the delay would have meant more time for the retreating enemy and added expenses in moving through his new defenses. On the other side of Riedseltz, fire from machine guns and self-propelled cannon indicated that the dog had turned again to fight. The 1st Battalion stopped that night at Ingolsheim and waited for counter batteries to be placed on the enemy armor.



*"... I understand it's got a built-in library, an elevator, and bath...."*



*"... There will be a slight pause for Nation Identification ..."*

Escaped Russian and Polish prisoners reported that they had been forced to work on gun emplacements just this side of visible Wissembourg the day before. This border town seemed to be our last barrier to the Fatherland.

The next morning the 2nd Battalion started out again, brushed past minor delaying forces, cut the Wissembourg-Altenstadt road about a mile from Wissembourg, and finally fought their way across the border. After one and a half years of kicking the German out of places he didn't belong, we were finally set to deliver the clincher in his own front yard.

For sake of bets, Fox Company was the first unit of the regiment, and for that matter the 36th Division, to invade Germany.

Artillery became heavier and deadlier as our advances brought us within range of Siegfried guns. Some four miles across the border, in the vicinity of Neider Otterbach, small arms began to mingle with the concussion of angry shells and our forward elements knew they had touched the sensitive tentacles of the West-wall. A futile attack brought us to the edge of the much publicized dragon's teeth, but no farther. It was time to take it easy and assemble all strength for the job that lay ahead.

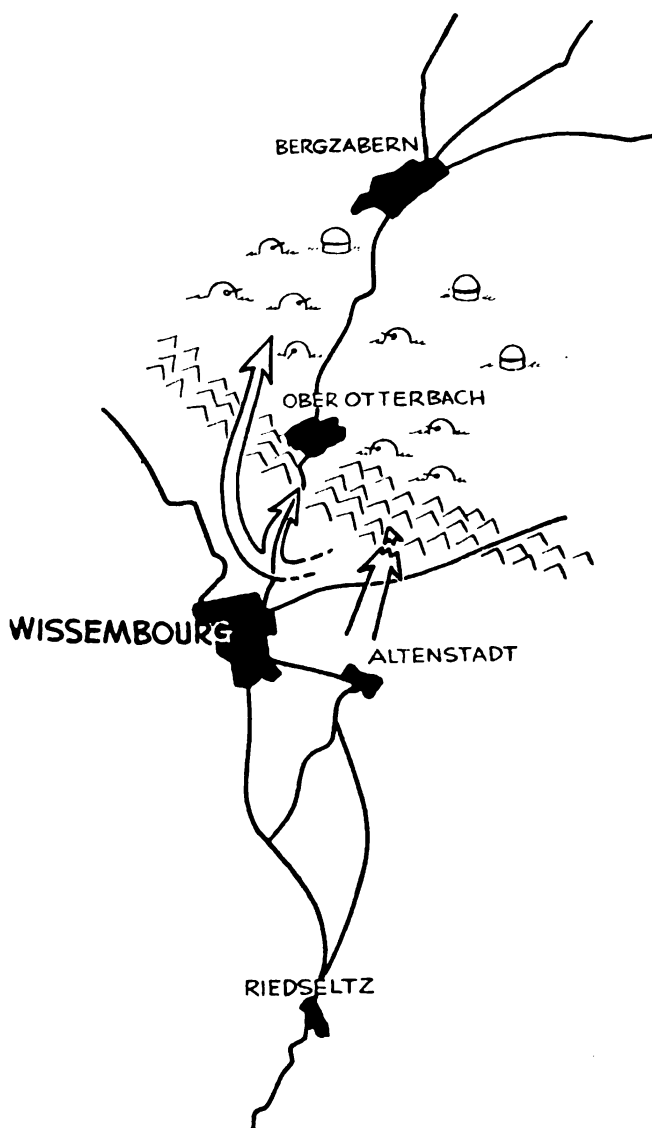
During our brief stay before and among the formidable fortresses we became acquainted with new evidence of German deviltry. On later examination of the Siegfried pillboxes we found the reasons for such well placed automatic fire, and for such terrific volumes of mortar and artillery fire. The defenses were so patterned that one pillbox covered another, sometimes for a mile in depth, and therefore anyone approaching the blind side of a block could be handled by a neighbor. Machine guns were mounted above ground and were remotely fired from below by a gunner who observed the area through a periscope. Fifteen of these were firing at one time at the forward elements of one of our leading companies. A few of the pillboxes contained a device that would put to shame our best 60 mm. mortar crews. This was an automatic mortar, clip fed, and capable of literally filling the air with HE. All the fortifications were expertly camouflaged, unbelievably thick, and interiorally as comfortable as a Fifth Avenue penthouse.

This warfare also brought back an old "Heller" quite popular with the Krauts

in Italy, the famous Screaming Mimi whose shells in their descent sounded like the blend of a wailing siren and a roaring lion. In addition the usual 88's, 150's, and 170's were there and active. We were fortunate that our Siegfried fighting was but a matter of a few days.

On the 20th of March, just five days after the initial move at Haguenau, we were ordered to attack the solid defenses with three battalions abreast, the 2nd Battalion on the left, the 1st Battalion on the right and the 3rd in the middle. The exuberance that had come from the successes of the past few days was replaced by the gloomy prospects of a frontal plunge into the steel and concrete of the mysterious Siegfried. As we approached the aiming stakes of the hidden enemy just across the open, rolling land, a scythe of fire suddenly flattened the leading riflemen. None of us, along with the supporting armor, were able to make even so much as a dent, and our forward elements were withdrawn. The next morning the 1st Battalion was pulled back, and with our Anti-Tank Company joined the 142nd Infantry at Schweigen.

The rest of us attempted one more attack, pulled back, then followed the 1st Battalion through the gap in the 142nd sector. Once inside the jig-saw of forts, it again became our day, though the work of cleaning out the nests was not a simple task. Beehives placed alongside a door and detonated made a drum of the buttoned boxes, and dazed Germans, bleeding from ears and nose, stumbled from their holes. The outline of the Siegfried soon became more distinct with the appearance of





*Bonbon*



*Carmella*

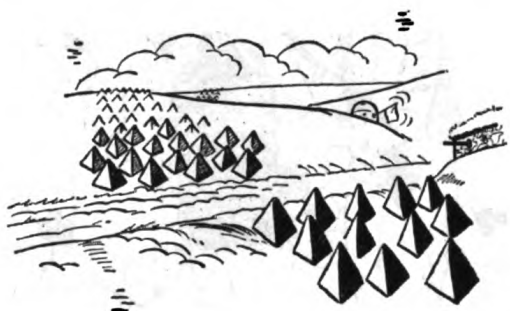


*Bonbon, Monsieur*



*Chocolot auch*

white flags. The 1st Battalion by the afternoon of the next day had cleared the woods north of Ober Otterbach and were pressing north again into the numerous emplacements that commanded the woods and hills above Bergzabern. Though resistance was fanatical at times, the Germans began to realize their helplessness. For those who resisted, there was the beehive at the door or a similar charge shoved into the air pipes. Our men of the 1st Battalion, in performing their ticklish assignment, cleaned a total of 47 big pill-boxes and like installations during the drive.



By the 23rd of March, the once vaunted wall was crumbled and our forward elements streamed east toward the Rhine. Patton's drive from the north into Kaiserlautern, and his unopposed sweep toward the river, made a narrow corridor out of what was once a pocket. Prisoners came streaming back. One of these, a bedraggled, unshaven straggler, with his tattered green trousers bulging with his day's fare of black bread and pork, was picked up by a negro soldier in the vicinity of our Service Company. As the proud American prodded his prisoner down the street, the familiar plea was heard from the captive, "Me Polsky."

"Get moving," retorted the colored boy, "Me Jewish."



There was no cause for delay. After a short pause, the regiment completed the dash and secured the Speyer-Germersheim area along the west bank of the Rhine. In three days of fighting we had completely eliminated the world's most elaborate defense, had captured over 700 prisoners, and helped anchor the Seventh Army on their final springboard into the heart of Deutschland. A cigar factory near Herxheim cut deep into the PX concession, and the price of P-38s fell to a ridiculous level. Suffice it to say our morale was high.

The enemy shelled us once or twice while we watched from our side of the stream, but other than that warfare was almost a duplication of Strasbourg. Some





of our part time mechanics fitted together a German fighter plane they had found in a captured assembly shed, while others up the river actually manned and fired an overrun 88 at the opposition on the German side of the Rhine. Vehicles, bumper to bumper, passed behind us and poured across the Seventh Army bridgehead. The idle days—plus the newly issued “Non-frat” cards—caused much speculation as to the end of the war. It was a unique and unpleasant experience not to be able to talk with civilians or bargain for a jug of beer, but the orders were strongly stressed in those days.

On the 28th of the month our old neighbors, the French, appeared again and with them the realization that we were to become rear echelon. By this time the war had rolled by us.

After a short stay near Bergzabern we moved some 60 miles to an area west of Kaiserslautern and began an intensive program of screening bewildered and downhearted German civilians. Screening is tedious and monotonous work, but infinitely better than fighting. It was here that we welcomed back an old friend who had so delightfully displayed her wares for us during the Italian campaign. Marlene Dietrich was a fine touch of the distant States.

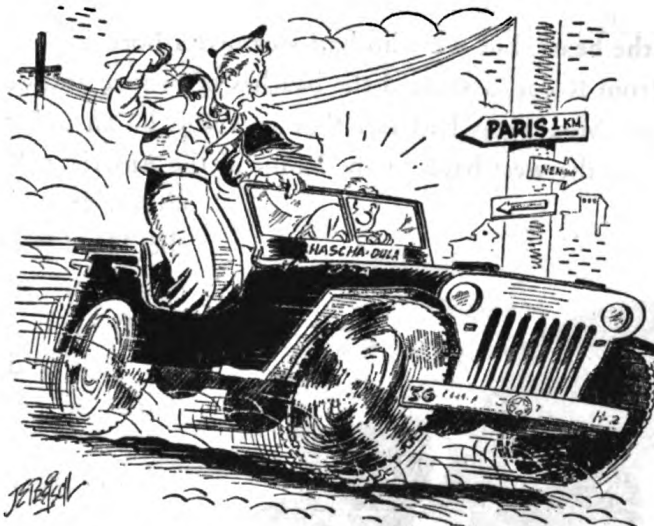
After finishing our work in that sector, we again loaded up, trucked to the fertile flat lands of the Palatinate, and continued with our screening in Frankenthal, Oggersheim, Neustadt and Worms, the latter merely a pile of mortar and bricks between two city limits signs. One man in the newly formed 4th Battalion claimed that a native there had to use a shovel to open his front door. It was our first real chance to see the results of Allied air power. As a feeble contrast, lonesome “Bedcheck Charlie” paid us his last sad visit one night, dropped a bomb or two in the Rhine, and then droned away never to return.

Perhaps the greatest selling point of this territory was the fact that it was the wine and champagne center of the Reich. Whether we liked the stuff or not, we had to drink it; it was so inexpensive we couldn't afford to let it go. Never since the days of Southern France had the refreshments been so plentiful.

The only mar to those pleasant days of April was the shocking news of the sudden death of our Commander in Chief and President, yet the war in Europe,

which he so vigorously and ably fought, was to end even before we had finished our mourning.

We remained here about two weeks all told, screening and guarding, playing a bit of ball in the cooperative warmth of the sun, and had fairly well decided it was the proper place to celebrate the soon expected VE Day, when someone started a vicious rumor. A few days later we were to put on our helmets, load our weary trucks and Jeeps, and head back into the miseries of our profession.



*"Dammit! Step on it! - or I'll miss the Riviera Quota!"*



*"... This is the way the world ends  
Not with a bang but a whimper."*

*T. S. Eliot*

#### XIV

## *The Last Ten Days of the War*

We were going back into combat! The thought of it brought a momentary icy sensation to the heart, but we who had stormed ashore at Salerno, driven the Germans north from Rome, assaulted the beaches of France and defied history by forging the Vosges Mountains had felt that it would be an unkind and obscure destiny to be left on the west bank of the Rhine as the American Volkssturm\* Divisions drove into the heart of

the Third Reich. It is strange how soon men forget the terrifying screech of an incoming shell and the merciless chatter of a German machine gun.

On the 26th of April we entrucked and crossed the Rhine River on the Ludwigs-hafen-Mannheim pontoon bridge and rolled through the green, rolling farmlands of Southern Germany. After leaving the bomb shattered cities on the Rhine, there was little of the destruction that is the aftermath of war. We were impressed with

\* GI slang reference to late arrival divisions in the ETO.



the healthy, well-fed appearance of the Germans and the outward neatness of the rural villages. Only in Crailsheim did we see the telltale indication that war had lingered here for a moment—long enough to leave it as hollow and gutted as the scorched-earth towns of France. By darkness we could hear artillery rumbling on the far side of the Danube; and GI's wearing the Blood and Fire patch\* told us that some of their companies had successfully crossed the Danube that morning—good news to us.

Here we were joined by our own Tanks and TD's,—Company A of the 753rd Tank Battalion and Company B of the 636th TD Battalion—a dirty, weary and bewhiskered lot who had missed our rest west of the Rhine. We were glad to see them. Months of combat with these units had dispelled distrust that occasionally springs between Infantrymen and Tankers. Unfortunately it takes most of a war for a bunch of doughs and tankers to get together and function as a team; but by the time we started our drive into the much publicized Bavarian "Redoubt" these two units had become firmly welded to our regiment.

The rest of the T Patch Division was trailing behind us at this time, and we were attached to the 63rd Division which was rolling to the southeast almost unopposed after crossing the Danube. The "rat race" was temporarily halted when we reached Schwabmunchen, south of Munich, and found all bridges of the Lech River blown and the tanks of the 12th Armored Division piled up for miles waiting to cross by the first bridge put in by the engineers.

The 29th of April was a cold, wet and morbid day. This part of Germany was dotted with concentration camps, and roadsigns contained the names Dachau and Hurlach. The roadsides were littered with bodies, dead and living, of the miserable inmates that had flooded out of the concentration camps as their SS guards fled before American armored columns. Many of us saw Hurlach, but our minds could not comprehend the sights, sounds and stench we found there. Even minds conditioned and fatigued by months of combat could not evaluate or accept this gruesome sight. We regarded the emaciated political prisoners, wearing the familiar zebra striped suits and peculiar knit caps, with mottled emotions of pity, anger, repulsiveness and awe.

\* The 63rd Infantry Division.



Late on the 29th, the rain turned to a freezing sleet and finally to snow. Early on the last day of April we crossed the Lech with the 1st Battalion on armored vehicles leading, and the 2nd Battalion following on trucks—many of them huge and unwieldy amphibious six-by-sixes, or “Ducks”. Our route lay along the west side of the Ammer See. As we approached the southern tip we caught our first glimpse of the snow covered Alps through the breaking clouds. It was a bitterly cold morning and all of our winter clothing had been turned in west of the Rhine. “It sure was a short summer,” remarked a Charlie Company light machine gunner, clinging to the icy deck of a TD.

Now, the 2nd Battalion was reenforced with armor and continued due south towards Penzberg while the 1st Battalion swung southeast towards Bad Tölz, the regimental objective. In this area we saw our last political prisoners wandering aimlessly along the roads, waving feebly as we rumbled past them. The mountainous Bavarian region we were entering had been utilized for summer homes of Nazi party leaders and SS hospitals and rest centers—the region that armchair strategists and tacticians had dubbed the “redoubt” for Nazism’s last stand. Both Battalions ran into heavy resistance late in the afternoon and became engaged. The 2nd Battalion took Penzberg just before dark and immediately regained contact with the enemy at a blown bridge just east of the town. The 1st Battalion ran into a strongly defended roadblock just out of Seeshaupt and spent the remaining hours of daylight destroying a stubborn enemy in an intense small arms battle. All day during the 1st of May both battalions fought forward against small delaying forces toward Bad Tölz—the 1st from the north and 2nd from the west. Late in the afternoon the men from E Company made contact with the men from A Company, and the 1st Battalion with a preponderance of armor, more than twenty armored vehicles, rolled toward Bad Tölz as the rest of the 2nd Battalion was involved in an effort to extricate Company G from a bitter fight with SS Troops between Bad Heilbronn and Bad Tölz.

Just before midnight the 1st Battalion reached the outskirts of the hospital and resort center of Bad Tölz. Just outside of this town an A Company Lieutenant and a ten man patrol captured Field Marshall Gerd von Rundstedt with his aide and son, a Lieutenant. As our leading tank approached the bridge across the Isar River in the center of the town, one demolition charge in the bridge was set off, but the Sherman rolled out onto the bridge, raking the far side of the river with its machine guns and 76 mm. fire. Charlie Company crossed the partially damaged bridge against heavy small arms fire and by daylight we had firmly secured the entire town.

It snowed in Bad Tölz the 3rd of May; the 3rd Battalion closed from west of the Lech River; our TD’s shot 200 rounds into a ski lodge filled with SS Troops.

Almost everybody had hot chow— our first east of the Rhine.

From this time until the end of the war we were fighting the SS and not the Wehrmacht. This had also been true as we came into Bad Tölz and there was ample evidence to substantiate the claim that the SS were terrorizing members of the Wehrmacht and civilians who showed any inclination to surrender. During the next three days the thousands of Wehrmacht and Luftwaffe troops that surrendered by company, battalion, regiment and division merely furnished an almost ignored background for the last days of our Division's drive through the very heart of the army that had conquered all of western Europe and threatened to dominate the world.

Our casualties in the Bavarian and Tyrolian Alps were by comparison to earlier campaigns negligible, but it was much harder to accept the fact that a screeching shell in the last minute of the war has the same lethal qualities it had during the most bitter of the early days in combat. American soldiers do not hate easily and they forget quickly, although there is no more deadly and determined animal than the GI at the climax of a battle. Yet during these last days there developed a new and acute loathing and hatred for the stupidity of the SS who fought on as American armored columns drove into the very heart of the Reich, making their cause utterly hopeless. We had a few men killed as the 1st and 2nd Battalions pushed into Bad Tölz and the 3rd Battalion suffered casualties south of Bad Tölz on the banks of the Isar River. Except for these grim incidents the pursuit into Austria from west of the Rhine would have been an adventure—physically tiring but mentally most gratifying to men who had fought across the endless procession of rivers, mountains and valleys of Italy, France and Germany.

On the afternoon of the 3rd, the 1st Battalion, followed by the 2nd Battalion, moved due east along the foot of the Alps while the 3rd Battalion moved straight south in the Isar River Valley and immediately encountered heavy resistance. The 1st Battalion turned abruptly to the south a few miles east of Bad Tölz and ran into self-propelled, mortar and small arms fire on the east shore of the Tegern See. Just before dark the battalion requested a fighter-bomber mission on Tegernsee, and held up offensive operations pending the delivery of the mission at six-thirty the next morning. During the night a woman from Tegernsee was apprehended and when brought to the battalion command post, stated that the SS had



agreed to withdraw to the south of Tegernsee and declare the town, which was filled with military hospitals, an open city. A patrol from the battalion moved into the town and found it undefended. The air mission was cancelled. In the meantime the 3rd Battalion, with I Company leading, cleared the first small town south of Bad Tölz and found that it had been an SS officer training school. Although of short duration the fighting here was bitter and a young tank commander was killed. Aggressive action by our tankers during the last few days of the war saved us many casualties. Six months later a platoon leader from I Company was reminiscing about the bitterness of those last days of fighting with the SS: "I'll never forget those medium tankers . . . Jerry had plenty of stuff in that little town and they led all the way. We killed fourteen SS in one house." By darkness the rest of the battalion, with K Company leading, had advanced through Lenggries, and we were still being shelled by a pair of artillery pieces south along the river.

The 4th of May found the three battalions of the combat team miles apart on separate routes, penetrating deeper and deeper into the Bavarian Alps. The 1st Battalion found little resistance south of the Tegern See and cleared Rottach and reached Velep, Himmler's summer home, which was unoccupied. The regimental command group, moving on the 1st Battalion's route, moved into the lavish home of Max Amann, Reichsleader of the Press and publisher of *Mein Kampf* and took the high ranking Nazi Party member into custody.

Swinging eastward from the north end of the Tegern See, the 2nd Battalion encountered light resistance on the east shore of the Schlier See, but dispersed it with long range tank fire. As the column rolled southeast down the hard surfaced highway dominated on each side by towering, snow clad and forested mountains the I and R platoon threw long range 50 caliber machine gun fire ahead of us, and when we met any resistance opened up with the convincing 76's and 90's from our Shermans and TD's on which our leading platoons were riding. As the Germans fled into the refuge of the wooded slopes we ignored them and drove deeper and deeper into the Alps, leaving thousands of armed enemy behind us. The roads were becoming jammed with prisoners coming down out of the hills. Soon the problems of disarming them, not to mention taking them into custody, became too time consuming. If we stopped at all it was to hurriedly collect their pistols and "issued" Wehrmacht watches, leaving machine guns, rifles and cannon intact. Most of them had thrown their weapons down—in the woods, into streams, in meadows or just into the ditches. In one spacious estate we found the swimming pool half filled with weapons. This was the only time during the war when we encountered a great number of the typical, movie-version German officers—monocled, arrogant, immaculately attired. German doughboys, like American, aren't the glamorous



type. Prisoners we had taken had always been the muddy, weary GI Joe of the German army with a weeks growth of beard, a long and ill fitting grey-green overcoat that was muddy from lying on the wet ground behind an MG 42, a duckbill cap and instead of a K ration in his pocket he usually had a little plastic orange box of butter, a can of Norwegian herring or sardines, a peice of greasy pork and the end of a loaf of black bread wrapped in a dirty peice of muslin, a small pair of



scissors and a straight edged razor. Not many of this type ever got back to the Bavarian "redoubt"—it had been a long war for the German doughfoot, too.

The outlook in the 3rd Battalion was just as grim on the 4th of May as it had been on the 3rd and the artillery seemed even more active as we moved south from Lenggries with I Company in the lead. An ex-Wehrmacht soldier came out of the little town ahead of us and offered to guide a company up the towering slopes to the east to bypass the resistance. The SS had killed his grandmother the night before and were shelling the town where he was living. Coming out into a snowy clearing high above the Isar, the leading platoon of I Company suddenly came upon six SS men operating an OP in radio communication with the artillery that had been hitting us with such accuracy. Being typical SS they wouldn't give up and fought until all six of them were dead; SS prisoners were rare those days. That ended the accurate artillery fire and K Company pushed on to the south with little difficulty.

On the 4th of May alone there were 3,297 PW's, including five Generals, that went through our processing and countless numbers that we were unable to handle jammed the roads to the rear. The night of May 4th found the 3rd Battalion still engaged on the bank of the Isar far south of Bad Tölz, the 1st Battalion at the

dead end of a Trans-Bavarian Super Highway that had never been completed except on the map, and the 2nd Battalion a few miles from the Austrian Border facing a yawning abyss in the highway where SS engineers had dropped a section of a great arched bridge several hundred feet below into a rocky gorge. Between the 2nd and 3rd Battalions it was 40 airline kilometers over rugged snow capped Alps and all units were out of radio contact with each other. Around us were an estimated 40,000 armed Germans.

It was late afternoon on the 5th day of May, 1945. The 1st Battalion had just closed into Kufstein on the Inn River after moving by truck from just south of the Schliersee to Bayrischzell, then south through the pass to Austria and had been alerted to be ready to move towards St. Johann. Then the alert was called off and the men relaxed in their billets and started to heat their rations.

The 2nd Battalion was 13 miles inside of Austria just west of the Walch See, and a light drizzle was beginning to fall. G Company had made contact with an enemy road block and had received a couple of wild rounds from a single Jerry artillery piece and had thrown back 75 rounds from two of H Company's mortars. Just across the creek to the south there had been a lively small arms fight going on with the heavy staccato thump of the I and R platoon's fifty calibers dominating an argument with the sporadic bark of German rifles. The rest of the battalion was halted along the road and some of the men were heating C rations on Coleman stoves. It had gotten almost dark and a 131st Field Artillery Captain up in the G Company position peered into the dusk through his glasses as two shells whined over his head and crashed into the road block up ahead. "Deflection correct, 200 over ... fire for effect." It was raining harder now and getting too dark to see clearly. The radio crackled and he listened for the familiar "on the way", but the reply came back, "All troops halt in place ... do not fire unless fired upon." The Captain quietly said, "Roger ... Roger and out ... all right boys, pack up ... mission complete," and walked back along the road in the rain.

Darkness on the 5th of May found the 3rd Battalion 20 kilometers south of Bad Tölz facing a fanatically stubborn enemy manning a road block. One platoon of I Company was pinned down by the road block and another platoon had just come out of the woods where it had been trying to knock out some SS manned machine guns firing long range plunging fire from high on the snowy slopes that rose abruptly to the east. There was a flak wagon someplace in the distance that was throwing harassing 20 mm. fire from time to time. The decision had just been made that the entire company would move up the hill and attack the machine gun positions at daybreak. It was getting dark and the cold air from the snowy slopes was slipping down into the bottom of the valley. A big, shaggy haired FO from the 155th Field Artillery was adjusting the mediums on the high





slopes above them and the spent shell fragments occasionally thudded into the ground dangerously near to us. A GI who had carried a BAR all the way from Cassino remarked half profanely and half reverently: "God Almighty, I'd hate to get hit this near the end." Just then a Lieutenant walked up and said, "the Major has just received word that the war is over and the 143rd will relieve us tonight."

Service Company entered Austria via the pass just west of Kufstein late on the afternoon of the 5th of May. As they approached the town they heard some enthusiastic GI, who had just heard news of the capitulation, discharging his weapon. Twenty Nighthawk drivers are reported to have grabbed their rusty rifles and hit the ditch, and that night the newest six-by-six motor in the company was burned out by a driver who had been driving since Camp Bowie.

That was the way the war ended for the 141st Infantry Regiment. It was several days before the war in Europe was officially over, but for us it ended just after dusk on the 5th of May. Most of us found houses to sleep in that night, although some of us stood outpost duty to guard against last minute treachery—there was none. Even the SS troops seemed ready to accept complete defeat; the surrender was unconditional. Demonstrations of an exuberant nature were very few that night. We sat around in small groups and talked very quietly or didn't talk at all. Most of us were occupied with our own thoughts and were inwardly thanking God that it was over and that there would be no groping through the early morning blackness moving up to an attack tomorrow or the next day or the day after. Some of us said that we were so quiet because the end came as an anticlimax to the obvious disintegration of the German Army, but others said that they suddenly felt very humble and very grateful—humility and gratitude are emotions that come easily to men who have fought as long and hard as we had fought. At any rate, that was the way our proud regiment ended the war... and her record, written by the efforts and sacrifices of 10,000 men, is an illustrious saga of modern men of arms.

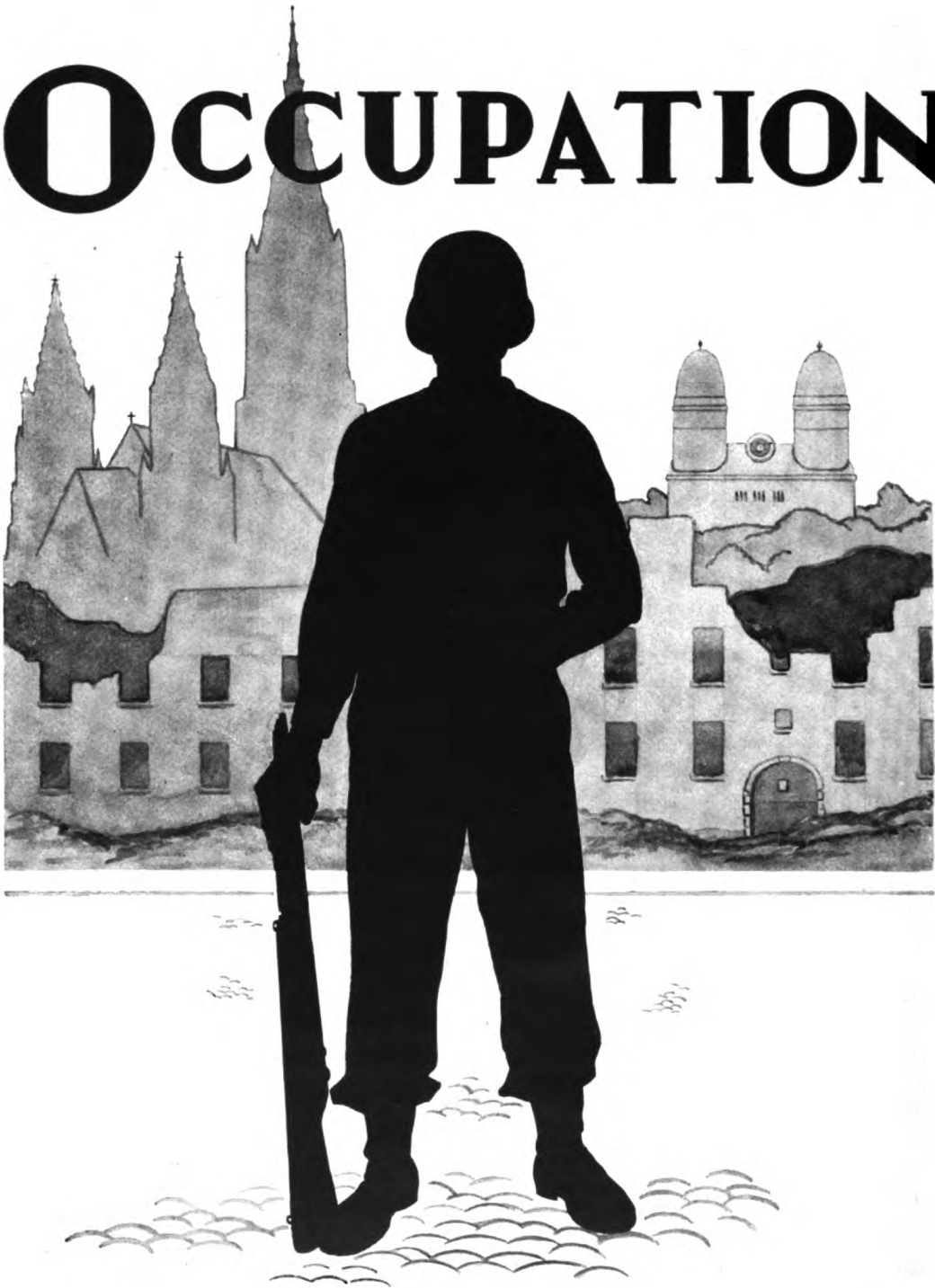


*“Five years have passed; five summers, with the length  
Of five long winters! and again I hear  
These waters, rolling from their mountain springs  
With a soft inland murmur.—Once again  
Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,  
That on a wild, secluded scene impress  
Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect  
The landscape with the quiet of the sky.  
The day is come when I again repose . . .”*

WORDSWORTH

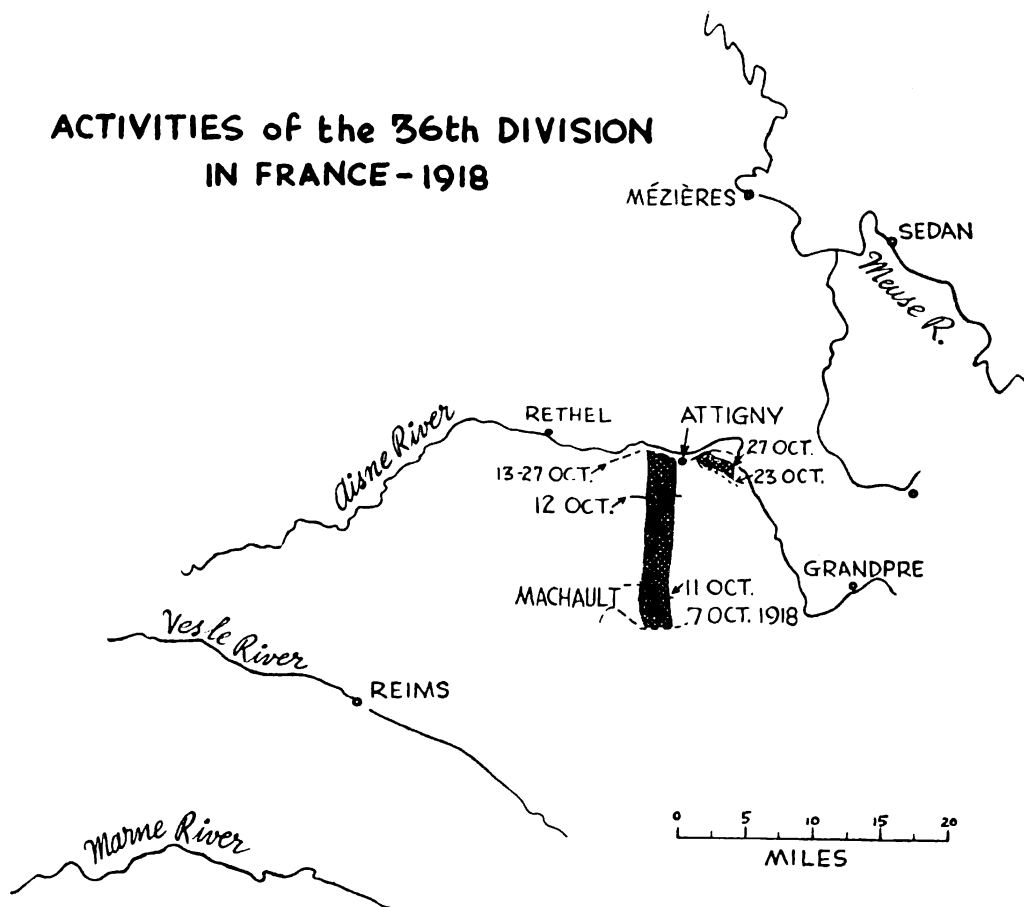


# OCCUPATION



"... that you may taste and acknowledge the bitterness of my victory."

# ACTIVITIES of the 36th DIVISION IN FRANCE - 1918





With amazing completeness the Shield of the 141st Infantry Regiment, designed by Colonel Richard J. Werner, depicts the history of the organization.

A white star, set against a blue background at the top of the insignia, symbolizes the Regiment's part in the Texas Revolutionary War of 1835-1836.

Underneath the star, a jagged line represents the unit's participation in the Mexican Border clash of 1916.

In the lower right section of the Shield, an heraldic cross, set against a maroon background, represents the occupation of Cuba during the Spanish American War of 1898.

Opposite it on the left and set against a white background is a blue fleur de lis, commemorating the unit's participation in the Meuse-Argonne Campaign in World War I.

At the bottom of the insignia is the Regimental Motto, "Remember The Alamo", in commemoration of the Company of the Regiment which was annihilated by a numerically superior Mexican force in 1836 while garrisoning the Alamo Mission. "Remember The Alamo" was later to become the battle cry of the Regiment and of the Nation in the Mexican War of 1848.

## A FEW FACTS...

- ... The men of the 141st Infantry were among the first American troops to land on the continent of Europe in World War II.
- ... Among the first troops to enter Rome.
- ... The first Infantry Regiment to land on the coast of Southern France.
- ... The first Regiment in the Seventh Army to cross the Moselle River.
- ... The first of the 36th Division troops to enter Germany.
- ... Since September 9, 1943, the 141st Infantry Regiment experienced 361 days of combat—137 days in Italy, 204 days in France, 17 days in Germany and 4 days in Austria.
- ... The Regiment sustained more than 6,000 casualties in World War II, including 1,126 killed, approximately 5,000 wounded\* and over 500 missing in action.
- ... During the fighting in France alone, the munitions section of the Regiment handled 3,500 tons of ammunition.
- ... In one month—August 15, 1944 to September 15, 1944—one of the Regiment's Nighthawk trucks drove 9,000 miles.
- ... For their action in World War II, the men of the 141st Infantry received 2,614 awards and decorations:

Congressional Medal Of Honor	—	3
Distinguished Service Cross	—	31
Legion Of Merit	—	12
Silver Star	—	492
Soldier's Medal	—	11
Bronze Star	—	1,685
Division Commendation	—	340
Foreign Decorations	—	40

\* This figure includes hospitalized personnel only.

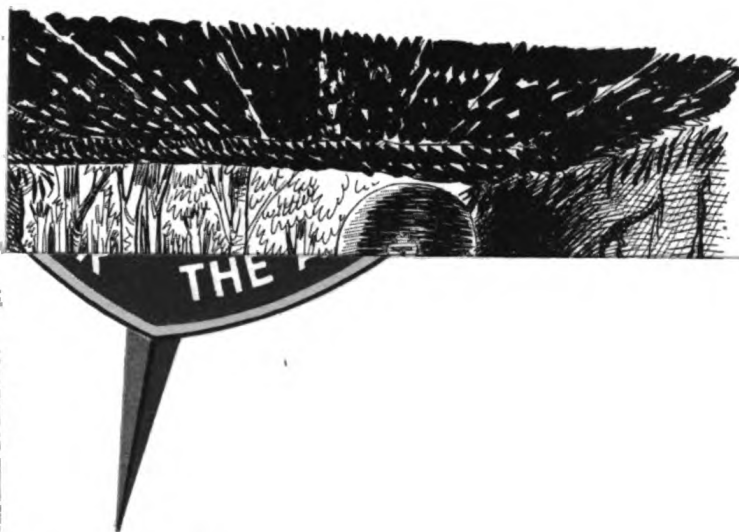




**"TERMITES!"**







ED UNIT BADGE  
ERN FRANCE—AUGUST 1944  
UEWIHR—DECEMBER 1944  
NO—SEPTEMBER 1943

IONAL MEDAL OF HONOR  
LOGAN  
CINITY OF SALERNO, ITALY  
H. COOLIDGE  
CINITY OF BELMONT-SUR-BUTTANT, FRANCE  
CRANE (POSTHUMOUSLY)  
NITY OF HAGUENAU, FRANCE

G E N D ★

PAIGNS  
GERMANY CAMPAIGNS  
CHER" TO NISIDA ISLAND, ITALY 2 NOVEMBER 1943

HED UNIT BADGE

*JP Russell*









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